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*BRITISH ARTISTS*

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LELY AND  
KNELLER

*Edited by S. C. KAINES SMITH*

# BRITISH ARTISTS

EDITED BY

S. C. KAINES SMITH, M.A., M.B.E.

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*The volumes at present arranged comprise the following,  
here given (approximately) in chronological order.*

*Vol.*

- I. The XVI Century Painters.  
With a note on the influence  
of Holbein.
- II. Cornelius Johnson and  
Jamesone.
- III. Dobson and Robert Walker.  
With a note on the work  
of Van Dyck in England.
- IV. J. Rley, Greenhill, J. M.  
Wright and Mary Beale.
- V. Lely and Kneller.
- VI. Thornhill, Jervas, Dandridge,  
and Hudson.
- VII. Hogarth.
- VIII. Reynolds.
- IX. Gainsborough.
- X. Romney.
- XI. Raeburn.
- XII. Hoppner and Lawrence.
- XIII. Opie and Cosway.
- XIV. Wright of Derby.
- XV. B. West, J. S. Copley and G.  
Stuart. With a note on  
American painting in the  
XVIIIth Century.

*Vol.*

- XVI. Paul Sandby, Towne,  
Cozens, with a note on  
the rise of water-  
colour painting.
- XVII. Kauffman, Bartolozzi and  
Zoffany. With a note  
on Foreign Members of  
the Royal Academy in  
1768.
- XVIII. Copley Fielding.
- XIX. Cox and De Wint.
- XX. Morland, Ibbetson, and  
James Ward.
- XXI. Richard Wilson and  
Joseph Farington.
- XXII. Barker of Bath and the  
Bath Painters.
- XXIII. John (old) Crome, with a  
note on the Norwich  
School.
- XXIV. Cotman.
- XXV. Constable.
- XXVI. Bonington and Girtin.
- XXVII. Bewick and Clarkson  
Stanfield. With a note  
on the Newcastle group.
- XXVIII. Turner.
- XXIX. Alfred Stevens.

OTHERS IN PREPARATION.





*Lord Lee of Farnham*

*Sir Peter Lely and Family*  
SIR PETER LE LY

# BRITISH ARTISTS.

EDITED BY

S. C. KAINES SMITH, M.A.

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## LELY AND KNELLER

*By*

C. H. COLLINS-BAKER

*Keeper of the National Gallery*



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## FOREWORD

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C. H. COLLINS-BAKER.



## EDITOR'S FOREWORD

THE inclusion of the Dutchman and the German who are the subjects of this volume, in a series devoted to British artists, calls for no apology, and scarcely for explanation, for the history of English painting in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is not the history of English painters. It would scarcely be unjust to describe the English-born painters of that period as parasites, depending for their existence upon the transplanted Germans, Flemings, and Dutchmen who came with craft and reputation ready-made to cater for the English need for portrait-painting; and, though a few of these parasitical dependents upon a foreign craft did almost attain to an independent existence, not one of them bore seed to carry on a race of painters independently rooted in their native soil.

In the beginning, Lely was no more an Englishman than Rubens or Van Dyck, both knighted by an English King, but in the end, by long acclimatisation, he became at least as English as the Court for which he worked ; and Kneller, upon whom his mantle fell, was far less German when he died in 1723, than the King of England who had come from Germany but nine years before. The eighty years and odd which cover the activity of these two foreigners in England cover also a period of English history fraught with trouble and change, of which the upshot was the definite entry of England into relations with the Continental world—the period in which England ceased to be an island. Consequently it was a period of assimilation and adaptation rather than of mere imitation of foreign ideas, ideas of art among the rest. Thus, it is not a matter for wonder that these two men of foreign birth and training should have become ‘English’ as their predecessors never could have done, for England was in flux, and was remaking

herself from a combination of elements drawn from many sources. She might almost have taken for her motto, in place of *Dieu et mon Droit*, the less aggressive, but more philosophic *Nihil humani a me alienum puto*—adding, to save her face, *Honi soit qui mal y pense* !

In any case, the influence of Lely and Kneller upon the development of English art is so deep and so far-reaching, and also so valuable, that any consideration of painting in England which did not take them into account would be a waste of time ; and, if it is hurtful to our national vanity to have to acknowledge that we could not have done without them, we can console ourselves with the reflection that neither could they have done without us. For Lely as a painter is not a Dutchman, Kneller is not a German ; though neither is wholly English, both became, in the aims of their art, more English than anything else. Unlike Van Dyck, who, with chameleon-like genius, adapted himself to any atmosphere in which he found himself,

and yet remained unalterably Flemish in all the essentials of his art; unlike Cornelius Johnson, who was more at home in Holland than in England, for all his English birth and practice; unlike their imported imitators who could not dare to be themselves, they progressed in the mastery of their art in proportion as that art became expressive of the point of view of the country of their adoption.

For Lely, at least, it cannot have been an inspiring experience. Neither the political nor the social conditions of England, during his lifetime, presented an exalted spectacle, and the only wonder is that he was able to make as fair a show for English men and women as he did, amid the hypocritical austerity of the Commonwealth, and the degradation of the Court of Charles II. If he had not been so sound a painter, and so devoted to painting as he was, he must have despaired before the uninspired and uninspiring animals whom he was called upon to paint.

There are, in Anthony Hamilton's sprightly *Memoirs of the Comte de Grammont*, word-pictures of pretty ladies, which read like the description of pictures by Sir Peter Lely; and it is all to the painter's credit that he has been able to present their sleepy beauty with all the charm of which it is capable, yet without a hint of the mire from which it grew, as no writer could do. The achievement is a triumph of art over nature, for it is neither in the person nor in the personality of the subject of such pictures that the beauty resides, but in the work of the painter himself.

Mr. Collins-Baker has used, in the following pages, a rare discrimination in presenting a picture at once of the artists and of the times and conditions in which they were condemned to work. He has shown, with a critical justice of which his great knowledge of the Stuart painters makes him a master that, while the character of an artist's work, and the degree of his appeal to succeeding generations, may depend largely upon the

surroundings and atmosphere in which he lives and works, the quality of his art is his own, and that upon that quality, rather than upon the relatively sentimental considerations of subject and appeal, his real value to art as a whole, and especially to the art of the country in which he works, depends. Nor has he ignored the question of the degree in which the painter is able to react to his surroundings, and to translate them into terms of his craft. Especially illuminating, from my own point of view, is his clear and moderate exposition of the fact, which it is all too easy to overlook, that, though both Lely and Kneller evolved a style of painting, and a type of portrait, which are English, in the sense that they are not anything else, neither of them ever arrived at a complete and instinctive understanding of the English character, and that, consequently, all their portraits from first to last are in a sense translations of that character into a kind of 'pidgin-English' of their own. Their portraits are seldom, if ever, profound,



not because they were not students of character, but because the characters they were called upon to study were, in certain essentials, foreign to them to the last. It was, perhaps, providential that most of the people whom they painted had not much character of any sort worth recording. It makes our loss the lighter, and perhaps does something towards the preservation of our sorely tried national vanity.

It is strange that the foundations of English painting should have been laid at a time when art had so little to express—strange, but not inexplicable. When, successively, caprice masqueraded as power, to its own undoing, ugliness stood for virtue, and, in natural reaction, licence drove out romance; there was little room for any real or clean emotion in men's lives, and the artist who sought beauty was bound to seek it rather in the method of expression than in the thing expressed. Some of the daintiest, and some of the nastiest lyrics in the English language were written while

Lely was painting, and poor Herrick's plaint, that he was, as a matter of fact, a very respectable parson, and not at all the kind of man the subject of his verses would lead one to believe, reveals the fact that the artist, if not his public, had arrived at a clear perception of the difference between beauty of form and beauty of content, and, while accepting as inevitable the content imposed upon him by others, pursued independently his own task of the creation of beauty in form. Such conditions actually leave the artist more free in the development of his art, for he is not deluded by considerations of sentiment into believing his subject to be beautiful in itself, nor into regarding mere imitation as the function of his art. A part, at least, of the soundness of Sir Peter Lely's craft, which was of such immense service to succeeding generations, must be attributed to the fact that it was only in his craft that he could take pleasure, and not in the subjects which he represented by its means. To some people, lovers,

as all of us are, of the intensely human portraiture of Sir Joshua Reynolds, of Gainsborough, and of Romney, the point of view presented by Mr. Collins-Baker with regard to the painters of the later eighteenth century in this book will come as something of a shock ; but a little cool reflection will convince them of its justice, for, however much we may love or admire the personalities presented to us through the medium of the art of Reynolds, we are bound to admit that his practice of his craft never displays the sound, methodical, almost scientific certainty which dominates all the work of Lely, and survives even the carelessness of Kneller in his haste to make money.

Thus, the very superficiality of the age in which these painters lived helped both them and their art ; for, while, as Mr. Collins-Baker points out, the art of portraiture labours under the disadvantage of being obliged to stand or fall by the degree in which the portrait impresses us with the vital presence of

a human being, so that mere beauty is a secondary consideration, it is equally true that art, as a whole, is concerned with matters more permanent and more universal than the personal qualities of a human individual as portrayed by an artist; and, moreover, the kind of beauty with which the art of painting is concerned addresses itself primarily to the eye rather than to the mind, and is to be found on the outside, not in the inside of men and things. Beauty, in fact, is skin-deep, so that in a skin-deep age, the painter has the best chance of devoting himself wholly to his art and of making the most of its possibilities. Only a supreme genius can establish in his work the perfect balance between heart and eye, and then only if his own sensibilities are perfectly balanced. Neither Lely nor Kneller was a supreme genius, and if they had been, they would have been wasted on their times; but both were good craftsmen, and Lely at any rate added much to the craft, leaving it nearer to perfection than he found it—

too near, in fact, for the purposes of his successors. Reynolds may have made a great advance when he broke away from the tradition in which he had been bred, but it was an advance rather in purpose than in achievement, and, in making it, he set back the craft of painting by a century or more, for the new purpose demanded new methods which he had neither the knowledge nor the patience to evolve, while his abandonment of the old methods betrayed him into blunders of craftsmanship which were enough to make the workmanlike Lely turn in his grave.

In fact, Mr. Collins-Baker does us a great service in reminding us that Hogarth was not so much the founder of the new English school of painting as the last and greatest exponent of the old; that this old school was derived through Van Dyck, and Rubens, direct from the great painting of the Renaissance, the source from which all good craftsmanship in colour, and all great mastery of line and form, are drawn; and that

the transmission of this tradition to England was the work of the two painters who are the subject of his book. By them this tradition was offered to English artists as an integral part of the equipment of painters working to meet the needs of ordinary English men and women, and those who followed them used it without any particular concern as to its original source, naturally and of necessity.

To Lely and Kneller, then, England owes that apostolic succession in art, which was broken by the nonconformity of Reynolds and his followers, a nonconformity which sent them back to Rome, to learn, imperfectly and in garbled fashion, principles that were deeply imbedded in the tradition which they had rejected. One cannot honestly say that the Georgians were to blame. There was no room, within the scope of the orderly and sure craft of the Restoration painters, for the superabundant sentiment of the eighteenth century. There was no use, in a generation of new

ideas, for the exact refinements of the art of an age of no ideas; and yet one cannot but deplore the loss of simple precision, and of the air of command and certainty, when they are supplanted by experiment, empiricism, and incoherence, even though we know that the inadequacy of the means of expression is the direct result of the fact that the artist has so much to say.

The Restoration painters had not, could not have, much to say about the humanity in the midst of which they lived, and of which they themselves formed part. But what they had to say they were able to say with consummate art—an art evolved, not created *ad hoc*, and therefore an instrument to be used with confidence, not a mere make-shift tool that might break in the hand of the user. The importance of Lely and Kneller in the history of art lies in the fact that they perfected this instrument for English needs, and made it, though they themselves were foreigners, an instrument which at least one English

painter could use for all the needs of his time. For this reason, if for no other, they must be regarded as 'British painters,' and their claim to the title is made abundantly clear in the following pages.

S. C. KAINES SMITH.



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## CHAPTER I

### BIOGRAPHICAL AND PERSONAL

CONSTANT though the pure current of English portraiture has been from the days of the early miniature painters, it seems always liable to submersion by stronger alien streams. When Lely came to England in April, 1641, in the train of the young Prince of Orange, he directly challenged two fashionable portrait painters: Cornelius Johnson, who had been here all his life, and Van Dyck, who had settled in London in 1632. William Dobson, who on Lely's arrival was fast acquiring a reputation, makes a third. In a lower layer were less fashionable and less gifted painters like Fuller, Hayls and Robert Walker. Studying the various work of all these men whom Lely found here, we observe that whatever of the old mode and spirit of English portraiture persisted in them had been pretty well subjugated by the brilliant Van Dyck.

The least affected were Cornelius Johnson and the miniature painters Cooper and Hoskins. So Lely, coming straight from Haarlem, found in London an atmosphere saturated with Van Dyck. Making it his business quickly to absorb this atmosphere, he was able, partly by luck and partly by his aptitude, to step easily into Van Dyck's practice when, with deplorable abruptness, death made it vacant. Thus the stream of English portraiture received another tributary which, entering through the Van Dyck channel, eventually submerged the native current, colouring the water for nearly a hundred years. Towards the end of its course the Lely influence was in turn tinged by Kneller, who to Lely was what Lely had been to Van Dyck.

Pieter van der Faes, known as Peter Lely, Lilly, Lyllly, and Lilley, was born probably in Soest, near Utrecht, on 14th September, 1618, son of Johan van der Faes, a Captain of Foot, and Abigail van Vliet, his wife. In 1637 Lely is recorded in the registers of St. Luke's Guild in Haarlem as pupil of the portrait painter

F. P. de Grebber, whose indifferent efforts may be examined in various large groups at Haarlem. His pupil presumably worked in that city, as Houbraken stated, till in 1641 he adventured to England in the suite of the boy Prince, William of Orange, who came over to marry our Princess Mary. He painted the royal pair, and though, according to Vertue, he was at first employed by George Geldorp, a painter whose position was probably due more to social gifts than to art, he must have stood on his own feet very soon. We know that in 1643 he painted James, Duke of York, and in 1647 the King and the Duke in the double portrait (extravagantly hymned by Richard Lovelace) now at Syon House. Success of this sort may have somewhat disquieted the established favourites, Johnson and Dobson, whom Lely found here. Johnson certainly migrated to Holland in 1643, and Dobson's early death in 1646 spared him any further heart-burning and removed Lely's only formidable rival.

Making the most of his chances, Lely had earned enough to appear among the

bidders at the auction of King Charles' pictures, held between 1649-1653. In 1651 he tried to promote a scheme for the decoration of Whitehall with mural paintings, in the company of the aforesaid Geldorp and Balthazar Gerbier.\* His

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\* The Humble Proposal to the Parliament of Sir Balthazar Gerbier, Kt., Peter Lilly and George Gelderop.

"Concerning the representing in oil pictures of all the memorable achievements since the Parliament's first sitting. It would bee very fit to have all the most remarkablest Battails and most considerablest Sieges of Towns in England, Ireland and Scotland to be painted, and to beset the same with the portraitures of such Generals and commanders as have during this Parliament's sitting fought and gained towns. To be placed in the Great Room and in other Rooms and Galleries at Whitehall for the satisfaction of the present time as also for posterity and for an encouragement to all such as are in autoritie and in Command. Also in the Great Room be placed a representation of the whole assembly of Parliament in one large piece to be placed at the upper end of the Great Room, formerly the Banquetting House, as also Portraitures of the several members of Council of State in another great piece for the other end of said Great Room, both of them being adorned with a comportment answerable to the saying in 85 Psalm, ver. 11: 'Truth shall spring out of the Earth and Righteousness shall look down from Heaven.' To be most compleatly done by Choice Artists in representing Personages, Battles and Landscapes. The sitters to bear the Charges." *Stowe MSS.*, 211, f. 3.

name occurs in the Waynwright letters,\* between 1651-1654, as the painter of Cromwell and "the best artist in England" who had drawn "a curious picture for his Highness and also for the Portuguese and Dutch Ambassadors." In 1656 Lely had a pass for Holland granted him, and in 1658 he is named in Saunderson's *Art of Painting* as one of the best painters in England. From these casual relics of Lely's history we can deduce that during the Commonwealth he consolidated the reputation and practice he had been building up under King Charles I.

We do not naturally associate Lely with the Charles I and Commonwealth periods. But as regards the Charles II era and Sir Peter one may safely say that the Restoration *c'est lui*. Immediately we speak of the Merry Monarch and his customs we think of Lely's set of Windsor Beauties, now at Hampton Court. Indeed, so restricted is our general view of Lely that to many his reputation rests entirely on these and similar drowsy, languorous ladies.

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\* *Sixth Report*, Hist. MSS. Comm., p. 426b  
ffarington MSS.

However that may be, we have entertaining evidence of Lely's promptitude in shrewdly touching the soft side of Charles II. In 1661 Lely was granted a pension of £200 per annum, "as formerly to Van Dyck."\* *Prima facie* this suggests that Charles was merely following his father in the rôle of patron. But in 1668, when Lely "is minded to lend into the Exchequer £1,000" and actually did lend £500, another complexion is given to this seeming princely generosity of Charles II. For now Lely makes a claim for £1,200 "for pictures." The magnitude of this sum led to investigation, in the course of which "Mr. Lilly says he quitted his debt for his pension of £200 per annum." Further enquiry showed that nothing had yet been paid of this pension granted seven years ago, "the said pension having been founded upon the said Lely's quitting a considerable debt due to him from the King." The evident conclusion is that Lely had hastened to put his pocket at

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\* For full details of this complicated transaction see *Lely and the Stuart Portrait Painters*, II., pp. 137-140.



the King's disposal, and that Charles had helped himself so freely that by 1661 a pension of £200 per annum was considered an adequate set-off. And we see that, though in 1668 none of this pension had been paid, Lely had been in a position to talk of lending £1,000 to the Exchequer, and actually to hand out £500. It is clear, then, that he must have done fairly well during the Interregnum.

For his prosperous circumstances after 1660 we have documentary evidence. Pepys constantly refers to him from 1662 to 1668, now as painting the Duchess of York and the King; now as "the great painter" who was either too busy to accept or could only book a sitting in six days' time, between 7 and 8 a.m., and whose "pomp of table" was conspicuous; now as painting the famous admirals of the Dutch war; now as "a mighty proud man, he is, and full of state." Then there is a warrant dated February, 1663, in the Lord Chamberlain's accounts for "Mr. Peter Lylley, picture drawer to his Mty. for the yeares 1660, 1661, 1662, 1663, to receive for such yeares 20 oz. of

guilt plate for his New Yeare's gifts, Mr. Lilly having presented his Maty. with considerable N.Y.G.''\* Among sundry other documentary references to Lely at this time we will mention a letter from Hugh May, an architect and apparently at one time Lely's servant, to the Earl of Essex, reporting Lely's decision as regards the decoration of a façade of Cashiobury, on which matter he was acting as Lord Essex's adviser.

Turning for a moment to Lely's personal family history, we find a tradition that he had a beautiful English mistress, who gave him two children, and whom he subsequently married. A vague legend suggests that this mistress was one of Charles II's miscellaneous offspring. But as Lely's children were born sometime in the 1660's, and as Charles II's industry in populating his realm did not, as far as we know, begin seriously before the Restoration, this is untrustworthy. The facts are that Lely had a daughter Anne and a son John, both under age in 1680. Indeed John still had a tutor in 1689,

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\* Lord Chamberlain's Acts, V., 315.

which leads one to suggest that he was born somewhere about 1670. Anne was certainly the elder; in April, 1680, a reference to her in the *Verney Memoirs* implies that she was about sixteen. Then in January, 1673,\* "Peter, son of Peter Lely, by Urcila, his reputed wife," was baptised and buried, preceded to the grave by his mother Ursula. The safe deductions are that Lely was living with the mother of Anne and John about 1663, and that if she were Ursula, the mother of the infant Peter, he never married her. Anne and John survived their father, and John was still alive in 1703.† Lely also left a nephew, Conradt Wett, and a sister Katherina Maria Wett, widow of Conradt Wett, burgomaster in Zwoll, in Guelderland.

Another light on Lely's great position is cast by Vertue's note that "the Duke of Buckingham and Lord Arundell lived very splendid and sometimes wanted money and pawned some of their pictures to Sir P. L. where they remained: thus

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\* Registers of St. Paul's, Covent Garden.

† *Lely and the Stuart Portrait Painters*, I., p. 148.

he got so many fine capital pictures." Here we see the neat ironic workings of fortune's wheel. In Charles I's time the keenest rivalry inspired the famous Buckingham to out-trick the great Arundel in the game of collecting. And now their spoils, so hardly won, quietly fall together, from their sons' lax hands into Lely's.

From Evelyn, too, we get a hint of Lely's power as a collector. For when the Diarist asked the Duke of Norfolk, in 1683, if he would part with his Raphael cartoons and drawings, Norfolk said "that the late Sir P. Lely (our famous painter) had gotten some of his best." As we have seen, "our famous painter" was among the bidders at the auction of Charles I's Collections. Round the nucleus thus formed he built such a gallery of art—pictures, drawings, sculpture, medals—that at his death it realised the vast sum of £26,000.\*

We have already given an instance of

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\* For a catalogue of part of Lely's collection see *Lely and the Stuart Portrait Painters*, Vol. 2, pp. 144-49.

Lely's position as arbiter of taste. Again, in 1677, in the *Verney Memoirs* (2nd ed. II, p. 324), we find him called upon to decide the merits of a monument to Sir Roger Burgoyne, to be executed for Sutton Church by Grinling Gibbons. "Lely and Hugh May are to decide when the monument is complete whether £100 or £120 should be paid for it."\*

This is one of the last references to Lely at present known. In January, 1680, he was knighted at Whitehall. In April a chance allusion in the *Verney Memoirs* tells us of his anxiety to find pleasant society for his motherless daughter "now at home with him." In May we have his signature to a receipt for various bonds taken from Sir R. Newdigate's tenants at Arbury as security for money owed him for pictures.† And then, last of all, we have Vertue's story that as the master was finishing the draperies of the Duchess of Somerset's portrait he died at his easel

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\* See *Lely and the Stuart Portrait Painters*, II., p. 134.

† Vertue, *Add. MSS.* 23069, p. 31. The *D.N.B.* says that when the Duchess came for her sitting she was told that Lely had suddenly died.

of an apoplexy. He was buried in St Paul's, Covent Garden, 7th December 1680, aged 62.

His will was made 4th February, 1679.\* His executors were Roger North, William Stotham, Hugh May and Sir J. Chicheley John and Anne Lely, already referred to, his heirs. He left property in Lincolnshire—Willingham Manor and Greetwell,† and to Anne £3,000 at her eighteenth birthday. His sister Katherine Wett was left £2,000, and each executor £100. The poor of St. Paul's parish, Covent Garden, came in for £100, and the building fund of St. Paul's Cathedral, £50.

Here we will note the prices Lely charged. About 1647 he was getting £5 for a head and shoulders, and £10 for a half-length. In 1671 Beale's *Diary* tells us that "Mr. Lely's servant told us his master had raised his rates from £15 a head to £20, and his half-lengths from £25 to £30; and that he intended to

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\* Camden Soc. Publications, Wills.

† He seems to have had other property Warwickshire way, in 1677. Writing to Sir R. Newdigate at Arbury he says that he hopes to go on to Arbury from his own small property.

finish every picture with his own hands. That he took the opportunity of raising his prices upon the doing of several pictures for the French Ambassador and the Duchess of Cleaveland.' By the end of his career Lely's prices were £20 for a quarter-length, £40 for a half-length, and £80 for a full-length figure.





## CHAPTER II

### TRAINING AND ASSOCIATION WITH ARTISTS

LELY was trained in the Haarlem Studio of F. P. de Grebber, from the year 1637. This period was the great mid-period of Frans Hals. But so far as we can tell Lely reflects no Hals influence. What his style was in 1641, when he arrived in England, is not clear. Possibly tradition is right in saying that the picture of *Sleeping Nymphs*, in the Dulwich Gallery, belongs to his Haarlem days. Renouncing them completely, whatever they were, on landing in England, Lely at once made Van Dyck his model. He can barely have met Van Dyck, who was largely abroad from September, 1640, till he returned to London, a dying man, in November, 1641. But, of course, the newcomer saw the fashionable master's

portraits in every house. He must also have seen the work of his two potential rivals, Cornelius Johnson and William Dobson. We cannot but sympathise with Johnson in his chagrin at Lely's rapid success. For he, poor man, was thus twice supplanted by an alien. Born in London twenty-five years before Lely, Johnson, outstaying Van Somer, Marc Ghaeraedts and Mytens, seemed sure of chief place in Charles I's artistic court. But in 1632 Van Dyck was imported and Cornelius cast heavily in the shade. And then, when that rival died in 1641, a new interloper, young Lely, was, as one might say, digging himself securely into royal favour. No wonder that Johnson threw down his hand and went abroad, for good, in 1643.

Dobson, eight years Lely's senior, was a tougher rival. Indeed, he strikes us as a fitter exponent of the Cavalier spirit than Lely. The ideal rendering of the Royalist youth of Charles' time is Van Dyck's *Lords George and Francis Villiers*, recently acquired by the National Gallery. And Dobson's *Unknown Gentleman* in the

National Gallery (lent by the Portrait Gallery), his *Sir William Farmor* at Welbeck; his *Sir Richard Fanshawe* at Bratton Fleming, his *Sir Charles Coterell* at Rousham, and the Duke of Northumberland's group of *Dobson, Sir C. Coterell and Gerbier* at Albury, all show how easily Van Dyck's courtly and romantic mantle hung on him. In the first part of the Civil troubles Dobson was Charles' favourite painter. But, like Van Dyck, he wasted his means and physique, fell into the debtors' prison and was bailed out to die, aged thirty-six, in 1646.

Thus Lely had the stage to himself, for, whatever practice painters like Robert Walker and Isaac Fuller had, it was not of the sort to cut into his. But we must remember this: when Vertue first saw the Syon House portrait of *Charles I and James, Duke of York*, he could not credit it as Lely's work, rather supposing it to be by Dobson or Fuller. We know hardly anything of Fuller now, but it is plain that he must have been a capable follower of Van Dyck. As for Walker, all that we can say is that possibly Lely took a hint

from him as to the appropriate solemnity for Commonwealth portraiture. For he evidently recognised that the mood fashionable in Cavalier days had to be toned down for Commonwealth tastes. During the Commonwealth, as has been stated, Lely, having survived or lived down his older rivals, became known as the best painter in England. Though this position was not formidably challenged after the Restoration, we should cast an eye over the rising generation of his rivals. The most notable was the Scots' Joseph Michael Wright (1625 ?-1700) who, after an education in Italy, settled in England *circa* 1652. He is conspicuous because he never submitted to Lely's influence. Indeed, of the painters of that time he seems the most various, so that even the close student will occasionally be puzzled to account for what may well be an unusual specimen of Wright's portraiture. Technically inferior to Lely, and never perhaps a fine painter, Wright is interesting by virtue of the restraint and breeding of most of his portraits and for his pleasant schemes of pale colour.

A good example of his work is the *Thomas Chiffinch*, in the National Portrait Gallery. A trifle of business connected him with Lely, whose empty house in Covent Garden he rented for a picture exhibition in 1686.

Lely's next conspicuous rival was Gerard Soest (c. 1605-1681), a Dutchman who came to England shortly after Lely. He, too, was independent of Lely's influence, though naturally he followed the same "movements." Thus his early work in England was Van Dyckian, but fresher and more refined than Lely's. His next stage was appropriately austere for the Commonwealth, his third was floridly in keeping with the Restoration. Soest in his top form was nearly Lely's equal as painter and colourist; but so inconstant was that form that Lely takes first place. On the other hand, if we were to pick six of Soest's most striking portraits, ranging from the 1640's up to the sixties, we should be surprised at their variety of excellence. He is indifferently represented in the Portrait Gallery.

John Hayls (1600?-1679), who

certainly was working in London during the Commonwealth and onwards, was a reputed rival to Lely. But the quality of his portraits would not have broken Lely's peace of mind. In Jacob Huysmans (1633?–1696) Lely had a different calibre of rival. This Dutch painter came to England at the Restoration, and set himself to imitate Lely, as Lely had imitated Van Dyck. A slick and competent painter, with a sad weakness for the rococo but barely a dash of serious interpretation in him, Huysman, or Houseman, painted many portraits which pass for indifferent Lelys: indeed, with one sitter, James, Duke of York, he did so well that a tutored eye is needed to distinguish Huysman at his best from Lely at his second best.

Of Lely's other alien rivals we will just note two birds of passage, Pieter Nason, who seems to have worked in England about 1663, and Pieter Borsseler, who certainly was here about 1665. His portraits of *Sir William Dugdale and his Wife*, and of *Orlando Bridgeman* are impressive works. These sound and accom-

plished painters could hardly be confused with Lely. Nor can we here dwell on Lely's apprentices and imitators, such as William Wissing (1656-1687); Messrs. Edward Hawker (1641-1721?), Lankrink and Sonnius, his studio hands, and Mary Beale (1633-1695?). John Greenhill (1641?-1676) was Lely's best pupil and later an independent painter of some power.





## CHAPTER III

### STYLE, DEVELOPMENT, CHARACTERISTICS

COMING to England straight from Holland in his twenty-third year, Lely must have been sharply struck by the Van Dycks he saw all round him. A new kind of painting and a new world of sitters were revealed to him. No wonder that, scrapping whatever preconceptions he brought over, he sat down at once to understudy Van Dyck. But we must note what may seem rather curious. He did not model his new style on Van Dyck's style in 1640; instead he chose the master's portraits of about 1635. So, speaking generally, we find Lely's first English manner of flesh-painting is smoothly thin, with lightly loaded lights and thin shadows. At first, we may be sure, it was coarse, compared with Van Dyck's. But in a year or two it had

become delicately finished. In contrast with this smooth and even flesh-painting, his first draperies are loose and coarse in handling: a student's clumsy exaggeration of the sweeping, flashing lights of Van Dyck's brilliant brushwork. From the first Lely was solid, even heavy, in his modelling, and his quite early draperies have that richness of tone and restraint of colour which made a good colourist.

As regards character, or temper, his first English portraits are of two main kinds: (1) heavily Dutch and bourgeois, and (2) markedly influenced by the more courtly and attractive cast of Van Dyck's and Dobson's work. From this we may reasonably infer that he had a little trouble in adapting his native outlook to the conditions he found fashionable over here. But we also know from the signed and dated portrait of *James, Duke of York*, at Syon House (reproduced in *The Connoisseur*, Vol. 55, pp. 3-5), that by 1643 he had gone far towards assimilating the correct Van Dyckian flavour. We also know that by 1647, when he painted the Syon House *Charles I with the Duke*

of York (v. same issue of *The Connoisseur*), he was able to produce work which Vertue would have confused with Dobson's, and which authorities of our own time have attributed to Van Dyck. On this point we may add that even now (or at least till quite recently) a typical Lely *Portrait of a Man* (1678), is hung in the Louvre under Van Dyck's name,\* and that in so well-known a collection as that at Ham House at least two portraits by Lely (one signed) are catalogued as by the greater master. And for a singularly charming portrait by him, once ascribed to Dobson, I will refer readers to the *Thomas Fanshawe*, reproduced in *Lely and the Stuart Portrait Painters*, I., p. 152, and the *Art Journal*, 1911, p. 305.

Lely's technique in the period under consideration, *circa* 1641-1650, is, as we have said, uniformly "finished" and, in the flesh, smoothly and evenly painted. The half-tones and half-lights are painted, as it were, in a thin enamel, on which the full lights are laid a little more solidly,

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\* See *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 22, p. 288.

but not loosely and flatly. The colour of his flesh half-tones is curiously subtle ; a depth of warm gray obtained by careful superimposition of a silvery film over a gray-purplish ground. Copyists of these half-tones invariably get a dead or flat colour, without the suggestion of bloom which we find in the genuine thing. The casual observer of Lely would be rather bothered to reconcile the technique of his first decade with that of his last, some twenty years later, and even more puzzled to recognise in the painter of the Van Dyckian early pieces we have alluded to, the better-known Lely of the Court Beauties and the gross men-about-town of Charles II's day.

The gap between these very different types of Lely is filled by his Commonwealth portraiture, c. 1650-1660. In this period, as is natural, he trimmed the character of his portraits to suit the more austere temper of the time. That is to say, we do not find quite the same effort to make his men graceful and decorative, and though his ladies wear much the same fashion of *décolleté* dress, the accent is laid,

not on their physical attractions, but on their seriously correct demeanour, *malgré* their short sleeves and ample busts. It is really quite remarkable how this consciousness in Lely of having to mind his P's and Q's affects the character of most of his Commonwealth portraits. The main result is that when he is dealing with a relatively young man or woman, modishly dressed (as, despite the Puritanic severity of the authorities, the less godly persisted in being), he generally succeeds in making the men rather awkward and dull and the ladies positively plain. And we know that, as soon as the embargo on physical attractiveness was raised, he painted precisely the same kind of sitters, in much the same costume, as gallant and decorative figures. So that we feel a little sorry for the pretty ladies (using this phrase unequivocally) who, as luck had it, sat to Lely between 1650-1660.

On the other hand, this period gives us some of his most impressive work, for it evoked a serious interpretative effort. If he had to paint one of a severe and

thoughtful cast, as, for example, the *Sir Harry Vane the Elder*, at Ham House, or the *Lady Bedel* (reproduced in *Lely and the Stuart Portrait Painters*, I., p. 154), in the Fanshawe Collection, he would produce portraits of dignity and insight which, in a serious conspectus of his work, rank higher than his much better known and more expensive society beauties. As regards the technique of this intermediate period we may say that in method it was a continuation of the earlier: evenly solid in texture, sober in spirit, and increasingly projective in form. In effect, these ten years completed what we may call Lely's preparatory period, which made possible the mastery and science of his later style.

With the Restoration came a release of energy. A nature like Charles II's would not improve in the lax conditions which exile and dislocation of life impose. Once the reins of tradition and habitual direction were cut by the destruction of divine rights; once the *amour propre* of a fugitive king was lacerated, a young man of far stronger fibre than Charles II

might well be rotted by chagrin and the sort of hospitality exiled princes usually receive. Restored to kingship by intrigue but with no rehabilitating consciousness of personal achievement, such a one as Charles would be confirmed in the cynical materialism induced by his experience. Bored and disillusioned, corrupt and utterly selfish, Charles had about as much sense of public or private duty as a late Roman Emperor.\* So Lely, discarding the Puritanic business, had rapidly to adapt himself to the reaction which attended such a king.

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\* Thackeray's passing comment on Charles II in exile is famous.

"What spectacle is more august than that of a great king in exile? Who is more worthy of respect than a brave man in misfortune? Mr. Addison has painted such a figure in his noble piece of *Cato*. But suppose fugitive Cato fuddling himself at a tavern with a wench on each knee, a dozen faithful and tipsy companions of defeat, and a landlord calling out for his bill; and the dignity of misfortune is straightway lost. The Historical Muse turns away shamefaced from the vulgar scene, and closes the door—on which the exile's unpaid drink is scored up—upon him and his pots and his pipes, and the tavern-chorus which he and his friends are singing. Such a man as Charles should have had an Ostade or Mieris to paint him."

It was not a question of a new technique, but of transferring the stress from sobriety and decorum to sensuous appeal. Lely's long practice in careful and subtle texture painting bore its ripest fruit in the ten years following the Restoration. That fruit is seen at Hampton Court in the series of *Beauties*. The chief example of this really remarkable subtlety of finish is his *Comtesse de Grammont* at Hampton Court. Rather later, but hardly less accomplished, is the *Duchess of Portsmouth* at Coombe Abbey. Such finish is not great art, because the impulse behind it is materialistic. But the technical capacity of a painter who can thus render the loveliness of beautifully groomed flesh, and the utmost niceties of texture and delicate colour, in a quality of paint which is as fresh and unlaboured as you please, is very high. Moreover, in these portraits there is a solidity of modelling and a breadth of atmospheric feeling, which are exceptional in life-size works so subtly finished. High-minded critics (labouring perhaps under some suppression), with a passion for the gaunt and



a distrust of the carnal, dislike Lely quite instinctively because he suggests more sensuously and convincingly than any other painter, including Boucher, the provocative touch and texture of the body. And in so far as success on these lines is cheap their instinct is right. But a less subjective criticism in justice recognises that Lely performed what, after all, was his job with about as perfect a technique as could be asked.

These sensuous and delicately finished women portraits are, in the main, the substance of Lely's popular reputation. But they show only one side of his art and his technique. Contemporary with them is a very different series of men portraits, and exceptional instances of women portraits ; for example, the fine *Unknown Lady*, at Compton Verney, reproduced in *Lely and the Stuart Portrait Painters*, I., p. 166. Lely, more than most painters, practised a distinct technique in his men portraits, so that when we pay our first visit to Greenwich Hospital, we are surprised at the difference between his *Admirals* there and his *Beauties* at

Hampton Court. For the "Flagg-men" are painted with a direct strength and expressiveness of brushwork, and with a feeling for fat, clean *coups de pinceau* which we never should have associated with the delicate enamel of the *Comtesse de Grammont*. In these portraits play is made with the opposition of loaded pigment to thin half-tones, in which the canvas grain is visible. If not quite as fine as the best of the *Admiral* series at Greenwich, the impressive *Van Helmont* in the National Gallery is an admirable example of Lely's 1660-1670 technique. An interesting comparison with the powerful, rugged brushwork of these *Admirals* is the contemporary *Sir William Temple*, in the National Portrait Gallery. Suiting his method to his sitter, a sleek and courtly gentleman, Lely uses the finished, even texture of one of his women portraits. Another portrait in this Gallery most valuably shows us the carpentry of his technique. In the unfinished *Prince Rupert*, apparently taken as far as two sittings, we can see his under-painting and the succeeding layer, and

enjoy his clean square draughtsmanship.

By about 1670 we note a new direction in Lely's technique. Like Van Dyck in his last phase, Lely turned to the consideration of other problems than the interpretation of surface delicacy and the sculpturesque building up of planes. He began to take an interest in the enveloping action of light and atmosphere. By 1665 he had taken delicacy about as far as he could and thoroughly explored the resources of the technique employed in the *Admirals* type of portrait. The next and last marked phase of his technique was comparatively impressionistic. His paint is looser, more freely and heavily brushed in, and his planes are less sharply divided. Vertue makes distinct mention of this characteristic of Lely's last manner, speaking of his "fine freedom of pencill, especially at the last." I can name no finer example of this freedom than the *Unknown Man*, owned by Mrs. Thompson, and reproduced in the *Art Journal*, 1911, p. 309. Of course, in roughly dating his final style 1670-1680, I do not imply that

as January 1st, 1670 (or March 25th in the old reckoning), dawned Lely broke out in this new atmospheric manner. But we know that from the end of the 1660's his style was becoming freer, and that by 1675 it was habitually loose and broad. For ready reference I may cite the *George Villiers, 2nd Duke of Buckingham*, No. 279 in the National Portrait Gallery, as typical of Lely's late style. Gross, florid, sensual, this is what the fair-haired boy in Van Dyck's *George and Francis Villiers* in the National Gallery had become after some thirty years of industrious deterioration.

An interesting contemporary comment upon this change of method occurs in the note-books of Mary Beale's husband, with reference to the portrait of Dr. Tillotson painted by Lely at Beale's commission. Every stage of the painting is mentioned under dates ranging from June to September, 1672, and the observation of the diarist is keen and technical, for it was exercised with the primary object of enabling his wife to imitate Lely's methods.



National Portrait Gallery

*The Duke of Buckingham*

Sir Peter Lely



The entry of June 5th refers to the dead-colouring, as follows:—

“ Dr. Tillotson sat for about three hours to Mr. Lely for him to lay in a dead colour of his picture for me. He apprehending the colour of the cloth upon which he painted was too light before he began to lay on the flesh colour, he glazed the whole place, where the face and haire were drawn, in a colour over thin, with Cullen’s earth, and a little bonn-black (as he told us) made very thin with varnish.”

And on 1st August, the following pathetic entry occurs:—

“ Dr. Tillotson sat to Mr. Lely about three hours for the picture he is doing for me, this is the fourth time, and I believe he will paint it (at least touch it) over again. His manner in the painting of this picture this time especially seemed strangely different both to myself and my dearest heart from his manner of painting the former pictures he did for us. This wee thought was a more conceiled misterious scanty way of painting then the way he used formerly, which wee both

thought was a far more open and free, and much more was to be observed and gain'd from seeing him paint then, then my heart cou'd with her most careful marking learn from his painting either this, or Dr. Cradock's picture of his doing for Dr. Patrick."

One can picture the two peering over the painter's shoulder, more and more bewildered at every stroke of the brush, as this "conceiled misterious scanty way of painting" grew before their eyes; and the long and earnest discussion between them afterwards, as they debated the possibility of penetrating the mystery of the new style; one is inclined to wonder whether, in face of this new development, they felt that they were getting full value for the twenty-four pounds nine shillings in Lakes and Ultramarines, and one ounce of Ultramarine of the richest (for Beale dealt in colours), which, together with a guinea in cash, they had paid for the two portraits of Dr. Tillotson and Dr. Stillingfleet.

Hitherto we have only considered Lely's portraits, which constitute his



main life work. He painted other things when he could find time. The best known to us are the Methuen *Lely and his Family*, now in Lord Lee of Fareham's Collection; the Chatsworth *Europa*, and the Dulwich Gallery *Sleeping Nymphs*. Of these, in my judgment, the finest is the first, and it is reproduced as a frontispiece to this volume. From it we can infer how high a place Lely would take as a painter of romantic *genre*, on a large scale, had he made that his main work. It is difficult to think of another picture of that period which exhibits so convincingly the spirit of the defunct Renaissance romanticism. Lely's contemporaries in the Netherlands (of course, Rembrandt is not involved in any such discussion) certainly showed no comparable spirit. And if we turn to Italy we shall not easily discover, among the late XVIIth century painters, whose minds were bent on the dark problems of *chiaroscuro*, either such refinement of mood or such beauty of light and colour. There is in the collection of H.H. the Maharaja Gaekwar of Baroda a *Judith*

and *Holofernes*\* by Lely, and an *Adorning of Venus* and *The Nine Muses* at Penshurst are said to be his.†

Walpole mentions most of these, and also a *Cimon and Iphigenia* belonging to Lord Pomfret, and a *Judgment of Paris*, which was mezzotinted by Lens; and of sketches in black and white, a *Holy Family*, which fetched five pounds in Streater's sale, and a bacchanalian subject of "four or five naked boys sitting on a tub, the wine running out" which was commended by Vertue.

Besides these subject pictures, Lely painted, in fatuous moments, Barbara Villiers and one of her bastard children, as the Madonna and Child, and in the same guise Louise, Duchess of Portsmouth. He also painted Nell Gwyn, naked and leaning on a bed, with her child. This picture, commissioned for that child's father, gave Charles II, as Vertue notes, an excuse for coming to Lely to see Nell painted, "when she was naked, on purpose." The Duke of

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\* See *The Connoisseur*, Vol. 57, pp. 1, 3, 5.

† See *The Connoisseur*, Vol. 16, p. 24.

Buckingham helped himself to this picture when James II fled.\* In a dark closet at Hampton Court used to hang a *Magdalen* by Lely; but I never ascertained its quality. On the other hand, the Duke of Grafton has a *Susannah and the Elders* of admirable quality, and at Ghent is a fine *Samson and Delilah*.

A word should be said here about Lely's drawings, of which a fine representation is in the British Museum Print Room. They are portrait studies solidly modelled and crisp in touch. The best are *James Maitland*, *Duke of Lauderdale*, and *Edmund Waller*. The latter is an early drawing, somewhat smooth and tight, in chalk, heightened with white, on gray

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\* In 1915 my attention was drawn to a photograph of a picture of a lady reclining, in Danae's usual position and attire, on a white drapery, propped by white pillows. A child's head and shoulders appear behind her raised right thigh. An urn stands on the right. The canvas measured 5 ft. by 4 ft., and was in a Mr. G. L. West's possession. From the small print I could not make sure that the picture was in fact by Lely. But it clearly was related to a Lely, roughly answering this description of *Nell Gwyn and Her Child*. Walpole mentions a "naked Venus asleep" at Windsor, which may have been this picture.

paper. But it shows Lely's power of expressing projection by pure line work. The date of this drawing is about 1650, and the *Portrait of Waller* at Holkham is clearly related to it. As far as I can tell, Lely's drawings are not so much preliminary studies for actual pictures as first essays on his part to familiarise himself with his sitters. The *Lauderdale*, a much later drawing, is one of the most masterly Lely drawings that has survived. It is far broader in treatment than the *Waller*, and much more atmospheric. The modelling is massive and the expression of fused light most remarkable.

In the British Museum also are two bust drawings of ladies of the Court. As regards likeness they are far less conventional than most of Lely's portraits. One of them, representing Barbara Villiers, in a hood, gives us a very different impression of that notorious person from the impression derived from the stock Lely portrait. All these drawings, I think, are signed either in full or in monogram. They are reproduced in the *Art Journal* of 1911, pages 337 onward.

It would be interesting to know if Lely ever sketched designs for the scheme of decorating Whitehall with battle and siege subjects. So far as I know, no traces of such an undertaking have come down to us.



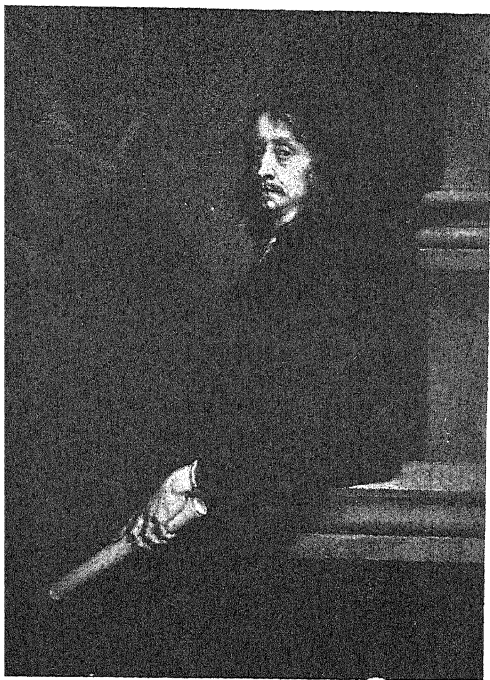
## CHAPTER IV

### THE QUALITY OF THE ARTIST, AND HIS INFLUENCE

HAD Lely worked in another era, his reputation would probably be higher. For, I think, there can be no doubt that, instinctively and quite unreasoningly, we are prejudiced against the *perruque* period. Of course, it may be said that a painter is born into the time which he deserves. Suspecting there may be a profound truth in this contention, I will not argue it. But there remain grounds for thinking that, had Lely painted wigless Burghers, like Van der Helst and Hals, no better than he painted Restoration Courtiers, we should think much more of him. We can test this theory and amuse ourselves by speculating how Van Dyck would have fared, had he been doomed to paint the *perruque* portraits which Lely, Kneller, Largillière and Rigaud had to paint. And we can consider the clear

fact that not a single portrait painter of the *perruque* period is taken very seriously. There can be no doubt, I think, that Lely's reputation has suffered by this misfortune of his place in time and by his coincidence with an age of monstrous artificiality. I have no doubt at all that if Van Dyck's two *Villier's Boys* and Velazquez' *Philip IV* wore long wigs they would be seriously depreciated in our eyes. Conversely, if Lely's *Baptist May*, at Windsor, had his own hair we should recognise it as the peer of Van Dyck's finest work. Nay more, I maintain that if Lely's *Unknown Man* in Mrs. Thompson's possession, or his *Sir Robert Long* in the Brownlow collection (reproduced in *Lely and the Stuart Portrait Painters*, I., p. 172) wore natural hair, we should rank Lely among the profound interpreters of life. That this is not the advocate's hired partiality is proved by the reception given to Lely's unwigged *Van Helmont* when it appeared at Christie's, where, coveted by two great public Galleries, it made a record price. Nor is it partisan to add that this *Van Helmont* is neither so finely





National Gallery

*Van Helmont*

Sir Peter Lely



painted nor so deeply interpretative as those portraits I have named.

Turning from these men portraits to Lely's child portraits, for example, the little so-called *Princess Mary as Diana*, at Hampton Court, and others in the Duke of Devonshire's and Lord Leconfield's collections, we are conscious that we cannot see them fairly, always having as a darkening glass before our eyes the painter of the Windsor *Beauties* and scores of tiresome languorous women and heavily-wigged men. But if we saw them clearly, with no such associations, we should hail them as among the best and most sympathetic child portraits of the XVIIth Century.\* Indeed, before we found more adequate interpretations of childhood we should have entered the territory of Reynolds and Gainsborough, the first exponents of our modern view of children.

In this preliminary survey of Lely's relative rank we have left his women

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\* It may save exceptionally acute critics pain if I observe that I am dragging in neither Velazquez nor *Titus* nor the *Dulwich Girl at a Window*. Rembrandt and Velazquez are *hors concours*.

portraits to the last : because in the first place there is less to be said for them, and in the second they are, we suspect, at the root of the disadvantage under which Lely's reputation labours. For not only was it his lot to portray a grossly material series of women, but also he was unendowed with the only gifts which would make a success of such a series. He had neither the witty, spirited vision of a Latour or Perronneau, the mordant cynicism of a Goya, nor the acid realism of a Degas. Lely's gifts were of a very different sort. But before we define those gifts and so reach a fair assessment of Lely's position we should attempt to see quite clearly what reason there is for the general estimate of his portraiture.

Perhaps it is more difficult to survive in portraiture than in any other branch. For portraits eventually rely on one factor. The interest of story, the freedom and variety of landscape, the picked effects of colour and lighting in still life, the skill and intricacy of pattern in figure compositions are not, as one might say, in the portrait painter's armoury. He may

introduce fine colour and striking illumination, he may paint with rich science and draw with fluent mastery. But if he does not reveal the inner qualities of character and thought, and the authentic stamp of experience, so giving others, less perceptive, the clue to understanding life, he has no chance of permanent repute. It is equally true that the landscape painter and the painter of story must have subtlety and profound insight. But we naturally are more exacting as regards insight into human character than as regards the inner content of pattern, the qualities of atmosphere and light, and the continence of Scipio or the sorrows of Lot's wife. If the colour be good and the design striking we are inclined to take for granted the inner significance of, say, Titian's *Entombment*. But though the colour be equally good and the design as adequate, we are relatively unenthusiastic over his portraits of young women.

As the years pass such portraits settle into the limbo of pictures which one does not notice, though the subject pictures may yet be admired. But portraits which

convince us of the actuality of the experience which gave this and that character to the face, portraits in which the embers of vivid life still seem to smoulder—these call to us as bearing on the very problem and experiences we ourselves share.

If we look over the accumulation of portraits that have come down to us, of what kind are those which are accounted masterpieces? We find that portraits live in inverse proportion to their prettiness and physical appeal. That for one vote given to a *Palmesque* courtesan ten will be given to a shrewd and ugly man: that active energy, like wit and liveliness, cunning and cruelty, force and passion, and above all knowledge, continue to interest us, where languid qualities, such as passive sensuality, dull inoffensiveness and placid handsomeness bore us.

In his place in time, as well as in his limitations, Lely was unfortunate. Like most things, the art of sexual attraction is subject to fashion. The vogue in Lely's day was drowsiness and melting languors, which were so perfected by the finest experts that De Grammont was not sure,

with some of the most successful Beauties, whether their eyes were shut or open. That the men of those days preferred this kind of provocation sufficiently exhibits their crude taste in amours. But, even admitting this, we must suspect that, had Lely been of a wittier cast and of a lighter touch, he would have found qualities of character—spirit, cleverness, devilry—what you will, to interest himself and us. For him, however, character too often ended with physique. Commissioned to portray a particular physical aspect of women, and the men who, demanding this aspect, evoked little else, he did exactly what was expected of him, and no more. He coincided with a phase of English history when idealism and belief were in eclipse, principle and honour dead, and an enemy's fleet could hold the Medway. Had he been of the company of Rembrandt and Velazquez, his great contemporaries, he would have probed to the stricken soul of those times and held us spellbound by his revelation. Had he been a Goya he would, with cynical, amused eyes, have analysed the greed

and grossness which inflamed a Barbara Villiers and a Buckingham, and the fear and fraud lurking within their lack-lustre eyes. Had he been a Degas he would have recorded with disillusioned absorption the evidence of physical and moral rot which his cold medical scrutiny observed in the nerves and bodies of a Brouncker or a wanton Shrewsbury.

But he happened to be plain Lely, to whom Louise de Querouaille was no more than a flaccidly seductive animal, to whom Barbara Villiers was only a coarse virago, a hectoring barmaid, and Brouncker but a mass of swollen pomp. He took most of them at their own valuation, with hardly a hint that he ever formed a private opinion. This method, as we have suggested, is not likely to produce permanently interesting portraiture. Hardly a hint, we say, because as time went on Lely does seem to have looked with his own eyes, and, looking, to have seen that however the window was dressed, all was not well within. In some of his later portraits—for example, the *Buckingham* in the National Portrait



Gallery—we realise that an uneasy spirit resides within the proud and coarsened face. So in the Windsor *Baptist May*, that corrupt “court pimp,” foreboding and regret lurk behind a cynical and debonair assurance.

I like to think that Lely, in the heyday of his power, turned with relief from the steamy, amorous air of the bed-chambers and backstairs of Hampton Court and Whitehall to the sailors of the Dutch wars. As we con the history of those days these men stand out from its pages as, for the most part, single-minded and efficient. At a time when Government and its parasites were paralysed by jobbery and belief in nothing, these sailors, despite scandalous and heart-breaking neglect, did their job brilliantly and thoroughly. They alone in that period of shame and muddle exhibit discipline and fortitude. In them alone, it seems, the great spirit of Elizabethan England was deposited. And though at last they were undone by the blows of Heaven and the lusts of Charles—the Plague and Fire, and the prices demanded

by the Windsor Beauties, so that, while a bankrupt fleet was docked, De Ruyter came up the Medway,—those men who fought at Lowestoft, in the Straits and off the North Foreland kept our honour bright. Lely painted the “Flaggmen” between 1665–1667, twelve in all. The portraits hang in the Painted Hall at Greenwich. We have already considered the quality of their technique. As for character, they give us a new reading of the Lely who at the same time was busy with the Palace parasites. The finest of them are the least courtier-like. The best, I think, is *Jeremy Smith* (reproduced in *Lely and the Stuart Portrait Painters*, I., p. 170). In him is revealed, as in no other portrait, the very spirit of the Ironside type of warrior; the resolution, the potential fanaticism, the unflinching severity and deep humanity of a Cromwell. It is true that Lely’s own nationality and his invincible habit of giving all his sitters one generalised look (a fault recognised by his contemporaries and one he shared with Kneller) come between us and a complete realisation of the true



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H. M. The King

*Baptist May*  
SIR PETER LELY



Englishness and individuality of Jeremy Smith. But none the less, if we discount that, as in this case is not difficult, we recognise that this is one of the great portraits of the seventeenth century. For sincere interpretation, to say nothing about magnificent technical quality, it comes, on the roll of Dutch masterpieces, next Hals and Rembrandt.

Enough has been said to indicate Lely's gifts and limitations, and to account for the general estimation of his artistic rank. We have seen that his portraits of courtesans are too physical, and not dainty or lively enough for our taste. We have made allowance for the peculiar drawbacks of the moral atmosphere in which he painted, but we have also let it be seen that we do not regard him as the victim of such circumstances. He was not a seer of profound imagination denied his chance by the accident of uncongenial conditions. He was not a square peg unkindly jammed in a round hole. On the contrary, he was a phlegmatic and comfortable soul, pretty content with his conditions. Nor was he aristocratic in

his art, as were Van Dyck, Dobson, Gainsborough and Reynolds. So we find no conspicuous canvas by Lely in the gracious gallery of English ladies, nor in the gallant company of English gentlemen. Dutch he was and therefore out of touch with so subtle and incommunicable a quality as the nationality of another people ; he was artistically bourgeois, and so precluded from instinctive perception of breeding.

On the other hand, we can speak unreservedly of Lely as a painter. His only peers in the history of English painting are Van Dyck and Kneller. The former's genius was more sensitive and quicker ; Lely never equalled the spontaneous lightness and felicity of the very best passages in Van Dyck's most expressive handling and modelling. His touch is more massive and monumental. But his sense of paint is richer and, when it comes to delicate perfection of surface, he could make paint do more than Van Dyck could. Compared with Kneller, Lely is larger and more solid in his feeling for pigment, just as in temper he is

graver and more thorough. As a colourist he is, on points, as they say, Van Dyck's equal and Kneller's superior.

When we come to compare him with the masters of a century later we feel that, if they are in effect more seductive, it is by qualities which are inferior to Lely's. The direct simplicity of method and the sheer value of draughtsmanship for which Lely stands were obsolescent in Reynolds and Gainsborough. A general lowering of stern old standards was in process, and various substitutes for first principles of form-expression were being tried. No longer was it fundamental that the surface of a head or hand should be inseparably related to the bony form within. The tests insisted on by Rubens and endorsed by Van Dyck and Lely were not applied by the generation which succeeded Kneller. Therefore, inevitably, drawing and craftsmanship decayed. It is true that other interests were developed, new qualities expressed. Reynolds, Gainsborough and Romney painted an incomparable series of English aristocrats: fine-bred ladies, witty, charming, queenly ;

noble and gallant youth; the fire and power of manhood; the wistfulness of children, the dignity and wisdom of old age. They, indeed, compiled a wonderful document of English society during the second half of the eighteenth century.

The astonishing outburst of art manifested in these painters was the fruit of the calm following the upheavals of the Stuart period, a calm in which English society diverged surprisingly from the society of Charles II's and James II's days. The blatant sensuality of a courtesan *régime* was incompatible with the decent domesticity of George III; the nobles had had time to acquire the manners of gentlemen, and the urbanity of culture. Their very clothes signify a mellower civilisation. A return from Reynolds' *Nelly O'Brien* to Lely's *Mrs. Middleton* is a journey to a fabled era from a world akin to our own. If Lely's women seem confined to a dead historical period, Reynolds' and Gainsborough's would not look much out of place in the late nineteenth century, however strange they might appear to-day.



But in accordance with a natural law this great expansion was not achieved without contraction in another organ—the organ of craftsmanship. While painting is ancillary to drawing, craftsmanship and style are assured. For if an artist has one main concern—the interpretation of structure—his paint is bound to be simply workmanlike: he has no spare attention for empirical but subsidiary affairs. His paint is bound, moreover, to interpret form, and so have a definite, inherent meaning. But once this simplicity and organic function are lost sight of and paint is turned to numerous and complicated tasks, craftsmanship decays. Reynolds is one of the worst craftsmen any school produced, not excepting Wilkie and Turner, simply because, impatient of the old view that painting was but the handmaiden of drawing, he, like any alchemist, was lured in the pursuit of the unattainable. Thus we have the common spectacle of faded Reynolds, of cracked and blistered Reynolds, of beautifully stippled Reynolds. But never have I

seen a Lely suffering from congenital disease.

From this change in attitude on the part of English eighteenth-century painters come most of our present disabilities of art. The transference of interest from fundamental structure to surface effects cost us also our tradition of draughtsmanship. This is not the place for any survey of the creeping paralysis which spread over English painting, which could not be arrested by the isolated phenomenon of a Constable or Cotman, and which eventually reduced our art to the average standard of the Royal Academy: a plight for which we are not consoled by the knowledge that all modern official art in every country is equally remote from true drawing and craftsmanship. But it may be more relevant to remark that the educational value of Lely has not yet been discovered. One explanation is that his best work at Greenwich and Hampton Court is beyond the reach of students and probably outside the ken of art school professors. Be that as it may, his legacy of a perfect

technique lies unclaimed, a technique of lucid order, of severely disciplined expressiveness and faultless constitution. The decay of painting which began with Reynolds has fallaciously been identified with a deterioration of mental taste. But in origin it was no more than a misconception of the function of painting. It is clear that, had Reynolds with no other change or diminution been as fine and disciplined a technician as Lely, he would be a greater artist. In the same way we are now told that revolt from tradition and resort to the technique of a child of four or a bargee will cure all ills. But it is not so simple as that. The dearth of imagination, perception and deep insight cannot be remedied by any recipe. But, on the other hand, no great thought is adequately realised unless it be expressed by lucid, beautiful and durable technique. Nature alone apparently can guarantee great qualities of mind and emotion, and in Lely's case she was not generous. But what mortal could do to discipline his hand and beautifully to express what was in him, Lely did.



## APPENDIX I

### PICTURES BY LELY IN ENGLISH GALLERIES OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

#### NATIONAL GALLERY.

Van Helmont c. 1665

#### NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY.

George Villiers, Second Duke of  
Buckingham (279)

Elizabeth Hamilton, Comtesse de  
Grammont (509)

Eleanor Gwyn (36)

Sir Edward Nicholas (1519)

Roger North (766)

Prince Rupert (608)

Gilbert Sheldon, D.D. (1837)

Anna Maria Brudenell, Countess of  
Shrewsbury (280)

Sir William Temple, Bart. (152)

William Wycherley (880)

#### ON LOAN TO THE NATIONAL GALLERY.

Simon Patrick, D.D. (1500)

#### TATE GALLERY.

Portrait of a Girl (1016) c. 1662

#### HAMPTON COURT.

Duchess of York 1662

Frances, Duchess of Richmond 1664

Lady Bellasis c. 1663

Comtesse de Grammont (*signed*) c. 1663-4

Henrietta, Countess of Rochester	c. 1663
Mrs. Jane Middleton	c. 1663
Lady Whitmore	c. 1663
Elizabeth, Countess of Northumberland	c. 1663
Countess of Falmouth	c. 1664
Anne, Countess of Sunderland	c. 1664
Lady Denham	c. 1664
Barbara, Duchess of Cleveland, as Bellona	c. 1665
Princess Mary or Jane Kellaway	c. 1668
Two Self Portraits	

## GREENWICH HOSPITAL.

Admiral Sir John Harman (2)	}	c. 1665 to 1667
Sir John Lawson (3)		
Admiral Sir Jeremy Smith (11)		
Sir William Penn (12)		
George Monck, Duke of Albe- marle (13)		
Admiral Sir George Ayscue (14)		
Admiral Sir Thomas Allen (15)		
Sir Thomas Tyddiman (19)		
Sir Christopher Mings (40)		
Admiral Edward Montagu, Earl of Sandwich (41)		
Sir Joseph Jordan (114)		
Sir William Berkeley (116)		

## CAMBRIDGE (FITZWILLIAM MUSEUM)

Lady Eleanor Holles (*reputed Lely*)

## MANCHESTER (CITY ART GALLERY).

Lady Whitmore

## WINDSOR CASTLE.

Prince Rupert	c. 1665
Baptist May	c. 1677

## DULWICH.

Abraham Cowley as a Youth (563)  
Nymphs at a Fountain (555)

PORTRAITS PAINTED IN LELY'S STUDIO, OR  
COPIES AFTER LELY, IN THE NATIONAL  
PORTRAIT GALLERY.

- George Monck, Duke of Albemarle (423)  
Henry Bennet, Earl of Arlington (1853)  
William, Second Viscount Brouncker (1567)  
Henry, Third Viscount Brouncker (1590)  
Barbara Villiers, Duchess of Cleveland (387)  
Thomas, First Baron Clifford of Chudleigh (204)  
Sir William Compton. (By H. Paert after Lely)  
(1522)  
Mary Davis (253)  
Sir John Harman (1419)  
Sir Peter Lely (951)  
Edward Montagu, Second Earl of Manchester  
(1838)  
James Scott, Duke of Monmouth and Buccleuch  
(556)  
James Butler, First Duke of Ormonde (370)  
Thomas Butler, First Earl of Ossory (371)  
Edward Montagu, First Earl of Sandwich (609)  
Elizabeth Percy, Duchess of Somerset (1753)  
Thomas Wriothesley, Fourth Earl of Southampton  
(681)  
James Ussher, D.D. (574)  
Sir Joseph Williamson (1100)  
Anne Hyde, Duchess of York (241)  
Henry Howard, Sixth Duke of Norfolk (613)  
Sir Paul Rycout (1874)  
Thomas Osborne, First Duke of Leeds (1472)

## APPENDIX II

### LIST OF WORKS ON THE LIFE AND ART OF SIR PETER LELY

Walpole's *Anecdotes*, 1828, iii, pp. 26-44.

*D.N.B.*, xxxiii, p. 19.

Bryan's *Dict. Painters*, iii, p. 205.

*Encyclop. Brit.*, Eleventh Edn., xvi, p. 408.

*Great Britain and Ireland*, by Sir W. Armstrong  
(Ars Una Series), pp. 170-174.

*Lely and the Stuart Portrait Painters*, by C. H.  
Collins Baker.

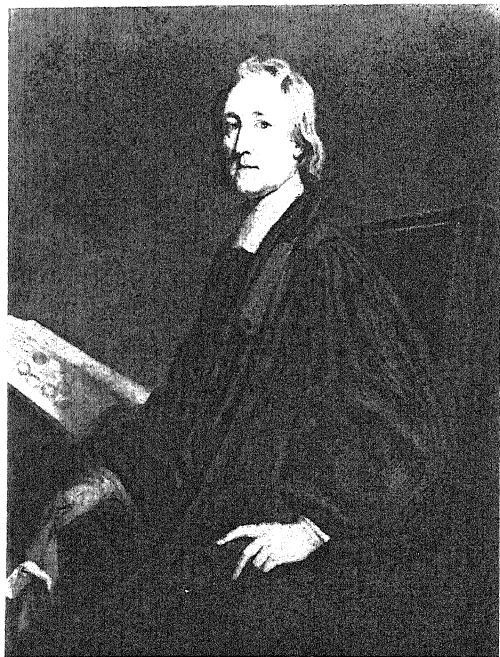
Wurzbach. *Niederländisches Künstlerlexikon*,  
ii, pp. 24-26.



SIR GODFREY KNELLER







*Thomas Burnett, D.D.*

Sir GODFREY KNELLER

*The Charterhouse*

## CHAPTER I

### BIOGRAPHICAL AND PERSONAL

GODFREY KNELLER or KNILLER was the third son of Zacharias Kneller, of Lübeck, in North Germany, and Lucia Beuten, his wife. This Zacharias was the son of "the surveyor-general of mines and inspector of Count Mansfeldt's revenues" (Walpole) and is said to have been an architect by Walpole, and a portrait painter by Cockayne.\* His three sons were Johann Zacharias, a painter, who accompanied our Godfrey to England, helped him in his study, painted good still life, and died in 1702; Andrew "of Hambrough, Gent" who, mentioned in Godfrey's will, probably survived him; and Godfrey, born 8th August 1646, at Lübeck—(Walpole suggests about 1648). Intended for a soldier, the lad studied

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\* *The Complete Baronetage* by G. E. C.

mathematics and engineering at Leiden, but in 1668, according to Cockayne, applied himself to Art. According to R. Buckeridge\* he was sent to study in Amsterdam. Bol is named as his master, and Vertue was told in 1713 by Byng, Kneller's studio assistant, that Rembrandt, too, had a hand in his training. Lest our young man should not have had every possible chance, Walpole throws in Hals as well. In 1668 Bol was painting one of his latest dated works, *The Governesses of the Leper House*, in Amsterdam; Hals had died in Haarlem in 1666 and Rembrandt died in October, 1669; so that, whatever Kneller got from Bol, it seems unlikely that he got much from Hals or Rembrandt. Byng, it should be noted, told Vertue that Kneller was about seventeen when he took to art, which would give us 1663 for the date, taking 1646 as the year of Kneller's birth. But I think Byng accepted about 1648, which brings us up to 1665 or so. However that may be, we must admit that if Byng,

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\* His edn. of R. de Pile's *The Art of Painting*, with Kneller's life inserted, 1750.

who was Kneller's journeyman and one of his legatees, told Vertue in Kneller's lifetime that Rembrandt had given his master some instruction, there probably was some truth in the statement. In 1713 Rembrandt had not the glamour he now has, and Kneller would not have gained anything by inventing the story. At the same time we must also concede that whatever interest the rumour has is sentimental. For, alas, Kneller's known work does not suggest that the great Master imparted to him any considerable mysteries.

Indeed, if we take Buckeridge's view, it seems that Master Godfrey was dissatisfied with the principles of teaching he found in Amsterdam. "Not contented with that gusto of painting, where exact design and true proportions were wanting, he went to Italy," arriving, so Walpole says, in 1672, though this is probably conjectural. There he is said to have studied under Maratti and Signor Bernini, working in Rome and Naples at history painting, architecture and anatomy. Next he went to Venice,

where Walpole asserts he stayed some time, employed by "some of the first families and where he drew Cardinal Bassadona." Marshall Smith\* names some of Kneller's Venetian patrons and numerous others for whom, and for the Cardinal, he painted portraits and historical pieces, the fruit of his study of Raphael and Titian. I have no idea where these Venetian performances are now.

On Byng's authority we know that Kneller came to England in 1674, apparently intending to make a short stay only, and then to return to Venice, "where he had gained a great repute." Presumably he came on the invitation of a fellow countryman, one Banks, a Hamburg merchant, with whom he lodged, and for whom he painted various family portraits. These seem to have made something of a stir, attracting the patronage of a Mr. Vernon, secretary to the Duke of Monmouth. This Mr. Vernon may be described as the bridge over which Kneller passed from nomadic obscurity to

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\* *The Art of Painting*, 2nd edn. 1693, as quoted by Vertue, *Add. MSS.* 23069.



the settled splendour of Sir Godfrey Kneller, Bart. For Mr. Vernon introduced the artist to Monmouth, who passed him on to his royal father. Incidentally this Mr. Vernon had installed Kneller in a house, after he had been one year with Banks—presumably in 1675.

Charles II's reception of the rising star is well known. Previously engaged to Lely, and with no time to spare for smaller fry, he permitted Kneller to paint him as he sat to Sir Peter. The story goes that while the latter, according to his custom, was building up the monochrome underpainting of his portrait, Godfrey finished his, slap-dash; a performance which evoked his competitor's tribute and, as Walpole puts it, "fixed Kneller here. The series of his portraits prove the continuance of his reputation." Byng suggests that this historic sitting took place about 1678, four years after Kneller's arrival. As we shall see later, specimens of his brush prior to 1680 are not common; and but for Byng's gossip and a note in Vertue's MSS. that Kneller "lived one year in York Buildings, and

four in Durham Yard," we have little evidence on his movements. Possibly he revisited Italy, as is implied by a note in Vertue, that the writer saw at Whitton, "the late Sir Godfrey Kneller's house, a picture of the Roman Amphitheatre dated 1677 and signed G. Kneller." But neither Buckeridge nor Byng mentions a return to Italy.

Byng's narrative proceeds from the point where Kneller won royal favour. It seems that the nobles and their ladies lent their countenance to the new favourite, who thus was firmly in the saddle when in 1680 his only serious rival, Lely, died. Expanding business, we gather, necessitated a larger establishment, so that Kneller moved to Lely's old pitch in the Piazza, Covent Garden. Byng thought he settled there about 1682; but perhaps it was earlier, even immediately after Lely's death. For, if Kneller arrived in London in 1674, stayed with Mr. Banks till the end of 1675, then was four years in Durham Yard, whence he moved to the Piazza, that would give us *c.* 1680. He remained there, Byng says, twenty-one

years, on lease, and then bought a house in Great Queen Street, where he died.

The rest of his career was that of an over-worked and not too conscientious court painter. Evelyn mentions him in 1685 as "the famous Mr. Kneller;" Walpole says, rather viciously, that "where he offered one picture to fame, he sacrificed twenty to lucre;" he was patronised by five monarchs at home, and was sent to France in 1684 to paint Louis XIV. Apparently he was away some time, for on his return, Walpole suggests, he found Charles had died (1685), and so had to transfer his services to James II. It is said that while Kneller was painting him James received the news that William of Orange was landed in Torbay. This was in November, 1688. Possibly Kneller had visited France again in 1687, when he painted a portrait of Louise, Duchess of Portsmouth, who is generally assumed to have settled abroad after Charles II's death.

For William and Mary Kneller produced his series of so-called *Hampton Court Beauties* which was to rival Lely's

*Windsor Beauties*.\* In consequence he was knighted, in 1692, and presented with a gold medal and chain. Walpole says that William commissioned him to paint Peter the Great, presumably in 1697-8, and Buckeridge informs us that he was sent, about the same time, to Brussels to paint the Elector of Bavaria.

William's death in 1702 gave Sir Godfrey a new royal patron ; his portraits of Queen Anne are numerous. In 1703-4 he painted Charles VI, Roman Emperor, " so poor a performance that one would think he felt the fall from Peter to Charles " as Walpole politically remarks. A far finer series of portraits than the *Hampton Court Beauties* is Kneller's contribution to the *Admiral* series, in the Painted Hall, at Greenwich. These belong to the early years of the new century. Then, too, were commenced his famous *Kit Kat* portraits, which lasted him virtually to the end of his career. This club, as Walpole says, " of the patriots that saved

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\* Kneller's series was housed at Hampton Court and Lely's at Windsor. Now both hang at Hampton Court.

Britain," occasioned forty-three half-length portraits by Sir Godfrey, some in his finest style, and christened a particular size of canvas (36 by 28 in.) a Kit Kat. The explanation of the name is that the Club met at a pie-house whose keeper's name was Christopher Katling. Walpole adds, "The Collection of portraits called 'The Kit-Cat Club' is that to which Sir Godfrey owes a great celebrity. The portraits were painted for Jacob Tonson, the bookseller, who was at that time the Secretary of the Club, and by him placed in a room, which he had built at Barn Elms, Surrey, to receive them, and in which the meetings of the members were held. The Club was established in 1703, and consisted of thirty-nine of the most distinguished Whigs. As they were all of them his patrons and friends, Kneller, no longer biassed merely by venal considerations, was proud to exert the happiest efforts of his pencil." In Walpole's day they were in the possession of Mr. Baker, of Hill Street, Berkeley Square. Now they are at Bayfordbury in the same family.

Another fashionable Club with which Kneller was connected in 1706 was the Social Club. The following circular, announcing the revival of this institution, shows us the kind of company our painter kept.

*"The Honble. Order of Little Bedlam and the list of Members and their names in the Club :—*

The Great Master, John, Earl of Exeter	Lyon
William, Duke of Devonshire	Leopard
Earl of Denbighe	Tyger
Ant. Verrio	Porcupine
Sir Godfrey Kneller	Vnicorne."

In fact, like Van Dyck and Lely before him, and Reynolds afterwards, Kneller cut a conspicuous social figure, probably to his art's cost. He reached a higher rung than either of his predecessors, attaining a baronetcy, 24 May, 1715. Pope, Steele, Addison, Dryden, Prior and Tickell all addressed specimens of flattery to him. Small wonder, reflects Walpole, that one so pandered to should have been vain. Instances of this vanity, fabulous

or actual, are given in various anecdotes of this kidney. "Kneller said to a low fellow whom he overheard cursing himself: 'God damn *you*? God may damn the Duke of Marlborough and perhaps Sir Godfrey Kneller; but do you think he will take that trouble with you?' " And again, when his tailor proposed that Kneller should take his son for an apprentice, the infatuated master replied: "Dost thou think, man, I can make thy son a painter? No; God Almighty only makes painters." Walpole cites Kneller's paraphrase of a particular text of scripture, "In my father's house are many mansions"; which Sir Godfrey interpreted thus: "At the day of judgment," said he, "God will examine mankind on their different professions: to one he will say, Of what sect was you? I was a Papist—Go you there. What was you? A Protestant—Go you there. And you?—A Turk—Go you there. And you, Sir Godfrey? I was of no sect—then God will say, Sir Godfrey, chuse your place."

Pope, indeed, laid a wager that there was no flattery so gross but Kneller would

swallow. To prove it, Pope said to him as he was painting, "Sir Godfrey, I believe if God Almighty had had your assistance, the world would have been formed more perfect." "'Fore God, sir," replied Kneller, "I believe so."

Two more anecdotes from Walpole are happier. Kneller had a fine garden to his Great Queen Street house, to which, through a door in the party wall, he allowed his nephew, Dr. Ratcliffe, access. But when he found that the doctor's servants stole his flowers he sent word to their master that he must shut the door. Ratcliffe replied peevishly, "Tell him he may do anything with it but paint it." "And I," answered Sir Godfrey, "can take anything from him but physic."

Sir Godfrey at Whitton acted as Justice of Peace, and was so much more swayed by Equity than Law, that his judgments, accompanied with humour, have said to have occasioned those lines by Pope :

I think Sir Godfrey should decide the suit,  
Who sent the Thief (that stole the cash) away,  
And punish'd him that put it in his way.



This alluded to his dismissing a soldier who had stolen a joint of meat, and accused the butcher of having tempted him by it. Whenever Sir Godfrey was applied to, to determine what parish a poor man belonged to, he always inquired which parish was the richer, and settled the poor man there; nor would he ever sign a warrant to distrain the goods of a poor man, who could not pay a tax. These instances showed the goodness of his heart; others, even in his capacity of justice, his peculiar turn. A handsome young woman came before him to swear a rape; struck with her beauty, he continued examining her, as he sat painting, till he had taken her likeness. If he disliked interruption, he would not be interrupted. Seeing a constable coming to him at the head of a mob, he called to him, without inquiring into the affair: "Mr. Constable, you see that turning; go that way, and you will find an ale-house, the sign of the King's Head—go, and make it up."

"These anecdotes," says Walpole, with several others, in which he dis-

played much genuine and characteristic wit, are given in the 'Letters of Highmore,' the painter, published in the *Gent. Mag.* In the Aubrey MSS., published in three vols., 8vo. 1813, is a note of a conversation which Sir Godfrey held with some gentlemen at Oxford, relative to the identity of a personage, formerly of great political importance, the disinherited son of James II. Some doubts having been expressed, he exclaimed with warmth: 'His father and mother have sate to me about thirty-six times apiece, and I know every line and bit of their faces. Mine Gott! I could paint King James now, by memory. I say, the child is so like both that there is not a feature in his face, but what belongs either to father or mother, this I am sure of, and can not be mistaken—nay the nails of his fingers are his mother's, the Queen that was. Doctor! you may be out in your letters, but I cannot be out in my lines.' "

Of Kneller's private life we hear from Walpole that he seduced a Quaker's wife (apparently named Voss, whom he painted

with her child, as we know from Smith's print), bought her from the Quaker, and had a daughter by her who figures as the *St. Agnes with a Lamb* in the portrait also engraved by Smith. Subsequently, 23 January, 1703-4, at St. Brides', he married Susannah Cawley, daughter of the parson at Henley. She outlived him, but apparently gave him no children. At any rate he died with no legitimate surviving offspring.

Walpole states, no doubt on information derived from Byng, that Kneller's prices were 15 guineas for a head, 20 if one hand was included, 30 for a half-length, and 60 for a full length. Some indication of his industry is given by Walpole's estimate that he lost £20,000 in the South Sea Bubble, and yet left an estate of £2,000 per annum to his widow and others. His will shows that his daughter Agnes' son, Godfrey Huckle, was a legatee, on condition that he took the name of Kneller; other beneficiaries were the daughters of his brother, Andrew of Hamburg, and our friend Byng. His house property was Whitton House, Twickenham, and his

houses in Great Queen Street, and Wild Street ; he also had property in Great Square, at " Rygate, Surry." His will shows us that Byng was to complete portraits left unfinished, in partnership with Lady Kneller, to whom all portraits, finished or not, were left. By the will Byng is not obliged to perfect the imperfect further than he and Lady Kneller can agree ; but in a codicil, made just before the master died, Byng is required, under penalties, to be more entirely subservient to the prospective widow. We note that no finished portrait, undelivered at Kneller's death, is to go out for less than the regular price, and that for the unfinished which shall be completed by or under Byng, he shall get a half share of the price. We can readily suppose that, if this clause was generally known, the portraits which came home after Sir Godfrey's death must have been eyed a little dubiously.

Kneller fell ill in 1722, but snatched a respite from Dr. Mead. " The humour, however, fell on his left arm, and it was opened." His will is dated 27 April—

14 October, 1723 ; he died in his Great Queen Street house five days later and, after lying in state, was buried on November 7th in his garden at Whitton, Twickenham. Lady Kneller died at Twickenham in 1729.



## CHAPTER II

### TRAINING AND ASSOCIATION WITH ARTISTS

KNELLER, as we have seen, came on the scene in London about 1674-75. As Lely had found a successful painter in possession when he arrived, so Kneller found Lely at the flood of his powers and practice. But, whereas Lely had few competitors, Kneller had several, who, if they made no serious inroad into Sir Peter's practice, pretty well divided among themselves the lesser but still lucrative sources of patronage. Some we have already mentioned with reference to Lely—the Dutchmen who came over to England at the Restoration and a few native artists. Among the former were Jacob Huysmans, who lived till 1696, Gerard Soest, who died in 1681, and Lely's pupil Willem Wissing, who died young in

1687. Other foreigners whom we have not mentioned and do not propose to dwell on were Johann Baptist Closterman, who came here in 1681, thrived, and died in 1711; a pair of Kersebooms, Frederick and Johann, who were working in England in the 1680's; and Simon Dubois, who practised here from about 1685-1708. Others there were who need not keep us. Of all these the first three must have seemed serious rivals to the newcomer Kneller. For between them they catered for the nobles, the court ladies and the professional classes.

Kneller also had to reckon with the native painters he found here; Michael Wright, whom we have noted as one of Lely's rivals, and who died in 1700; John Greenhill, who by careless living stupidly cut off a career of brilliant promise; John Riley, Soest's pupil, whose practice extended from about 1670-1691, and Mary Beale, who had a large business from about 1670 till her death in 1697. Wright was in Evelyn's phrase "the famous painter," and he signed himself "Pictor regius." He painted



Charles II, all the judges of his time, and had what is called a sound connection with the best families. If he did not paint Hampton Court Beauties, he painted, very agreeably, the ladies of a quieter and better set. Greenhill, who died in 1676, two years after Kneller came, seems to have been consolidating a good practice among the squire and noble class. Riley, who painted both Charles II and James II, and many of the greatest nobles, ran, as one might say, a side-line of bourgeoisie business, painting city magistrates, divines, and other professional people. He had Closterman for partner, at one period, not altogether to the advantage of his output. Lastly Kneller had to reckon with Mary Beale, that assiduous student of Lely. She had a fair *clientèle* among the aristocracy, and rather specialised in superior clergy.

This competition, then, had to be faced when after his casual visit to Mr. Banks, in 1674, Kneller decided to remain in London. In his favour, perhaps, was his foreign experience, his ability to roll off his tongue such names as Titian and

Raphael, Maratti and Rembrandt. Also, he had the luck of good introductions, which, as we sadly know, will get royal commissions for worse painters than Kneller. But yet more valuable assets were, I suspect, a pushing confidence, a skilled address, and the priceless gift of knowing how to invest success at compound interest. In thus looking rather low for the cause of Kneller's success, instead of lifting our eyes to the plane of artistic superiority over his competitors, we may seem to be doing his attainment as an artist, before 1680, less than justice. But in defence I will plead that so much of his work done in England between 1674-1680 as is known, does not indicate that he was then as good a painter as Greenhill or Riley, Soest or Wright. But tide and time were on his side : for death disposed of Greenhill very soon ; Riley was of a diffident and conservative cast ; Soest, growing old, was beginning to show it in his art ; and Wright, though but little over fifty when Kneller came, was not improving. Later Wright went to Italy in a semi-secretarial capacity, and so, as

Walpole suggests, dropped clean out of the race. For when he returned, perhaps about 1690, Kneller was securely established and now by far the abler artist. Wright is said then to have tried his luck in Scotland, with no more profit.

On the other hand we cannot suppose that Kneller caused Lely any uneasiness. For though he had youth in his favour he certainly had, in Lely's life-time, no corresponding artistic advantage over the older man. As we have seen, he made a sort of sensation when, in competition with Lely, he nearly finished his portrait of Charles II by the time Sir Peter had dead-coloured his. But, though Lely applauded this performance, I can hardly suppose that it exhibited to his skilled eye much more than slickness. Lely's training in, and lifelong fulfilment of, the canons of anatomical solidity must have contrasted strikingly with the training and performance of Kneller in 1678 or so. Van Dyck was a master of line and of form-expression by line. Lely grounded himself for years on this tradition until solid projective modelling was second

nature to him. But Kneller, by all accounts, was taught quite differently. Bol in comparison with Van Dyck was superficial in his interests, and the kind of history painting which young men studied in Rome and Naples, towards the close of the seventeenth century, did not overburden them with the science of fundamental structure. Nor would Kneller's subsequent business in Venice have inevitably directed his attention to such first principles. Therefore we are not surprised by the earliest Knellers we see in this country, which betray an interest in surface qualities rather than in solid drawing. Indeed they make us realise that but for the grace of God and the influence of Lely, Kneller might have been no better painter than a Wissing or a Closterman.

But he clearly differed from these in having the sense to see that Lely's mastery lay deeper than the colour and brushwork of his portraits, and the resolution to take himself in hand and gain a similar mastery. Hence we find Kneller perpetuating the legacy which

Lely received from Van Dyck and bequeathed to his successor. For about twenty years after Lely's death Kneller steadily developed as a draughtsman, starting as nearly as he could from the model Lely's work of the middle 1660's provided. Lely, as we have noted, gradually became interested in questions of atmosphere and fusion. Kneller, too, outgrew his earlier interest in carefully differentiated planes and sculpturally solid modelling. But his superseding interest was not quite the same as Lely's. With him it took the form of a more nervous and fluent and interpretative drawing; so that in his freest and most fluent paintings we can see the germ of Gainsborough's almost water-colour use of oil paint.

Indeed, Kneller is the duct by which the older stream of portraiture flowed into the modern. Historians and biologists assure us that continuity rather than new starts, succeeding unbridged gaps, is the true reading of the past. In the same way if we would justly see Reynolds and Gainsborough and, much more, Hogarth, we

must truly observe their relation to their predecessors. If we had to span from Lely right across to early Gainsborough and Reynolds, with no intermediate piers, then we should be conscious of a gap difficult to bridge. But when we have as stepping stones Kneller and his immediate pupils, his contemporary Michael Dahl, who settled in London about 1688 and died here in 1723, and Riley and the products of his studio, the way runs uninterruptedly to the great masters of the second half of the eighteenth century. Too often we speak vaguely of Hogarth as the founder of modern British painting; the more scientific view is that he is the culmination of the older tradition, the last and best of the old school. And if we fixed our eyes on Reynolds' mature work we might in the same loose way describe it as sudden creation, not evolution. But if we regard Reynolds' first beginnings, ere ever he went to Italy and became a cosmopolitan and scholar, we see at once that he links on naturally to the portraiture of Kneller and his school. Where a gap may be seen with more apparent

justification, is between the earliest Reynolds and the most mature. But this, too, can be negotiated by an understanding of the interplay between individuality, travel and changing times and customs.

A moment ago the name of Michael Dahl came up. This Swedish painter, who studied in France and Italy before he settled down in England, is confused with Kneller more frequently than is any other painter. Not without cause, since he took the greatest pains to imitate him. But he never became a draughtsman, as Kneller understood the word. For, while he could draw the contour of a face or hand well enough, he failed to suggest, as Kneller could, the solid, bony structure within. On the other hand he was so successful and so much patronised by the great families that he may be said to have been Kneller's rival for thirty years, not, however, to the extent of causing Sir Godfrey to lose either any sleep or any work he could have taken on. It is worth note that of Kneller's later contemporaries only Dahl considerably

shared his patronage by the Court. There seems to have been a clearer line drawn between these two favoured artists and the rest than was the case between Lely and the lesser men of his day. It will, therefore, be enough to say that the better painters struggling along in Kneller's shade, between 1700-1723, were Charles Jervas (1675?-1739), Kneller's pupil and Elisha; Joseph Highmore (1692-1780), also Kneller's pupil and an important figure in the transition period between his master and the Reynolds period, as, too, was Thomas Hill (1661-1734); Jonathan Richardson (1665-1745), Riley's pupil, like Thomas Murray (1663-1734); John Vanderbank (born probably much earlier than the reputed date, 1694; died 1739), who stood with one foot in the Kneller school and the other in Richardson's, from which came, too, Thomas Hudson (1701-1779). This is not the place to speak of these save as they touch Kneller, or rather as they were affected by him. And perhaps nothing more particular need be said on that score than this: though we rightly distinguish



the Soest-Riley-Richardson school from the Van Dyck-Lely-Kneller, since the output of these schools differs in recognisable characteristics, yet we have to add that, just as Lely so predominated in his time that at least a tinge of him was reflected by all his contemporaries, so Kneller threw a beam, as one might say, on all these painters, and beyond them.

The foreigners whom the Hanoverian Court harboured—Zeemans, van Huijsings, Van Bleeck, and so forth, all caught something of Kneller's worst mannerisms, which one Smibert took as part of his outfit to New England. From the slight knowledge I have of American portraits, I should say that these mannerisms had a very great influence on the development of this art across the Atlantic.



## CHAPTER III

### STYLE, DEVELOPMENT, CHARACTERISTICS

ALREADY we have commented on the paucity of Kneller's recognised pre-1680 work ; dearth prevents our doing perfect justice to him, because, on the incomplete evidence before us, we can say no more than that he appears either to have been indifferently taught or else to have neglected rather special opportunities. We have been duly impressed by the legendary splendour of his education, to which Ferdinand Bol, Rembrandt, and Frans Hals, Carlo Maratti and Bernini,\* to say nothing of the works by Raphael and Titian which he is said to have studied in Italy, are alleged to have contributed. Then, with our eyes a little dazzled by the

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\* Byng asserts that Kneller studied architecture in connection with his mention of Bernini. It is worth note that recently attention has been drawn to a series of portraits painted by Bernini, (*Rassegna d'Arte*, 1920, p. 145).

brilliant eclectic picture formed by all these names, we turn to see a few flat, undistinguished portraits which appear to belong to his first years in England. In deed, but for one surprisingly good picture, the *Cornelius Bruyn* (1355), in the Rijks Museum, which may reasonably be assigned to a yet earlier period, we are at present but entitled to say that when Kneller came to England he was a quite mediocre painter, not only as regards character interpretation but also technically. His line is coarse and inexpressive, his modelling empty and his faces are mild convex forms, reminding one of masks. About the only difference between his work and that of such men as Closterman and Wissing is that it is less showy and, in colour, more yellow. Perhaps this was the splendid fruit of his intimacy with the Venetian secret !

Against this disappointing inventory of facts we have to set the tradition recorded by Byng and Buckeridge that Kneller's efforts in portraying the Banks family, his successes with Monmouth's secretary, Mr. Vernon, and Monmouth's own

portrait, gave him such a standing that the Court flocked to his studio, and he was permitted to paint the King. Of course, merely to paint the King did not mean very much: Riley and Wright, for instance, had shared that treat with Lely, and yet did not secure his business at his death. But this Kneller did, out-pacing and out-staying all competitors. We must therefore credit Kneller, as against the dismal debit set out above, not only with traditional successes but also with actual triumph. And here we should interject that if his portrait of the Duke of Monmouth, which is said to have set the seal on his first success, is found, that may prove how superior his accomplishment was, before 1680, to our present estimate. Hitherto, however, such search as I have made, in quarters likely to contain this *Duke of Monmouth*, has been fruitless. Either the portrait has been lost or I failed to recognise it.\*

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\* At Dalkeith Palace there is a charming full-length *Monmouth*, to my eye, when I saw it many years ago, evidently by Riley. More percipient students may discover in it Kneller's authorship.

In this connection we must note a portrait in the National Portrait Gallery, once called Isaac Newton, I believe, but now Godfrey Kneller by himself. We see a young man, apparently about twenty-five, certainly not over thirty. It is full in modelling and curiously pale in colour and unlike any portrait I have seen. If it represent Kneller, it would have been painted probably about 1671, and not later than 1676. I do not say that facially it is irreconcilable with later authenticated portraits. On the other hand it is markedly inconsistent with any painting known to be by Kneller. It differs considerably from the Amsterdam *Cornelius Bruyn* and bears no resemblance to a portrait in the Victoria and Albert Museum, by Kneller, and said to be his own portrait as a young man. But we must remember that at present our acquaintance with his early works is very slight. If this Portrait Gallery picture, which at present is a puzzle, be really by him, then we must regard it as something of a freak; for, though it may refer most valuably to the

Italian style of Kneller, it certainly does not lead up to the English work by which we know him. In the same way, if, as I suspect, the Amsterdam portrait is a relic of his earliest manner—Bruyn was born in 1624 and appears no more than forty, at the most—it is curiously unrelated to the earliest English Knellers we know, and much better than they.

From 1680, the year of Lely's death, the evidence of Kneller's activity mounts up, so that though the portraits of this period are clearly different from, say, the portraits of the 1690's and later, we have no difficulty in studying them and recognising in them the gradual development of Kneller's style. Perhaps we can best summarise the character of these earlier portraits, in relation to the later and more usual, by describing them as flatter in projection and more smoothly convex in plane. That is to say that, chiefly as regards the men portraits of this time, the bony structure beneath the surface is insufficiently realised, so that the recessive planes of a head are imperfectly suggested. Hence we are con-

scious of that mask-like flatness of the cheeks, already alluded to in connection with yet earlier pieces. A conveniently accessible example of Kneller's modelling and technique is the *Charles Montagu, Earl of Halifax*, born 1661, and here apparently not more than twenty-five, if that. The face is relatively flat, the colour is rather florid, and the painting is distinctly coarse compared with that in later works. The *Wren* of 1711, hanging near, is an instructive comparison. Men of most times and places have, in portraiture at any rate, more clearly defined bone structure than women. In Lely's and Kneller's day round plumpness was fashionable in women. The number of leanish, long faced women portraits painted by these artists is relatively small. We can hardly suppose that Nature was entirely responsible for this prevalence of a round faced type, more especially when we recall that but a few years before, in Van Dyck's day, the long, thin oval was more common. Possibly the conspicuous success of Nell Gwyn and Louise de Querouaille, in the principal business in



which women were then interested, caused most fashionable ladies to wish for sleek, round faces. Their painters had been less than gentlemen, had they not seen to it that art, at any rate, produced a thought consonant with this motherly desire. Kneller, for his part, played up to this ambition, if such it were, like any modern face manipulator; so that we find most of his earlier women portraits with faces of an almost ball-like surface: smoothly inflated to a nicety. Later he modified this semi-globular pattern by allowing for the truer niceties of modelling.

His technique at this time is the most individual part of him. Here, probably, we see signs of his more cosmopolitan education. For at will he was able to paint now in Lely's adaptation of Van Dyck's style, and now in a method which so far as I know had not been previously practised in England. Especially in his draperies, in some of his earlier portraits, we find an extraordinary richness of impasto, which, while it would not surprise us in a Reynolds, causes us in portraiture of about 1690 to rub our eyes and look

again. Then, again, contemporary portraits by him are painted in a thin and liquid technique, which reminds one of nobody but Gainsborough. If we may judge by events, Kneller concluded that for him and his necessities this thin and liquid technique was the more serviceable. And, regarding the mass of his commissions and the consequent need for a swift means of dealing with them, we can see that he was right, though in some portraits it is evident that he scamped even this economical technique.

In the case of technique so irregular as Kneller's it is unwise to dogmatise about method or to attempt to reduce it to a settled formula. But, striking an average, we are justified in saying that the method he used most frequently with the most success was a thinly painted method. First he drew the features and contours in a supple, free and sensitive line, which by itself suggests the projection and recession of the various planes. Then he laid in a monochrome of greenish gray or silver gray which serves eventually for the half-tones. Then, working on this

ground while it was wet, and nicely leaving what he meant to stand as final, he laid in the half-lights and lights in a thin liquid overpainting of virtually two colours, cool ivory and carmine. Where necessary, last of all, he added the stronger accent of a deeper and warmer tone. In the hands of so sure a draughtsman as Kneller became, and so fluent a brushman, this system was very rapid ; in two sittings the head and bust and arms would be complete. A similar simplification would make short work of the draperies and accessories, with which, doubtless, his assistants often helped. In a great number of commissions Kneller doubtless entrusted these latter items entirely to assistants, and many of the heads attributed to Kneller, some with his signature attached, are almost certainly the work of studio hands. Too seldom he took pains to attempt a variation on the stock of designs he had inherited from Lely ; very rarely was he sufficiently interested to work out a novel play of colour, though he is a fine and subtle colourist.

The best period of Kneller's output extends, roughly, from about 1695 to 1715. In those limits we find a series of portraits, men and women, which for brilliance and sound standard of technique compare evenly with the record of any court painter. Needless to say that this period is not free from Kneller's besetting sin of carelessness: and perhaps we could count up against Kneller, in his best period, more instances of this kind than we could against another. Later we shall discuss in detail the technique of this period in relation to his finest work. Here it will be enough to refer again to the *Christopher Wren*, in the Portrait Gallery, painted in 1711. This is a perfect example of the master's almost magical use of pigment. The simplicity of his process, the transparent freshness of the result; the faultless skill which makes the silver under-painting play through the warm second film, the apparent ease with which the gradation of colour is managed, and the keen incisive form, all prove that Kneller, when he liked, could handle paint as well as any master.

Walpole considered the following portraits the most creditable to Kneller's pencil :—

*Frederic, Duke of Schomberg, Equestrian,*  
and his best picture in that style,  
(Marquis of Lothian, Newbattle Abbey,  
Scotland.)

*Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke*  
(Petworth.)

*Sir Christopher Wren*, sitting and holding  
a scroll, a *View of St. Paul's*. (Royal  
Society.)

The same, whole length, sitting. (Theatre,  
Oxford.)

*Dean Aldrich*, half length. (Christ  
Church, Oxford.)

*Dr. Sacheverel*, which gives the best  
specimen of a clerical wig of that time.  
See the engraving by Smith.

*Lady M. W. Montagu*, the portrait  
intended for Pope. (Luton.)

*His Own Head and Pope's*, given to the  
Bodleian Gallery.

*John Lock, in His Own Hair*.

*Bishop Burnet*. (Wimpole.)

*Charles Mordaunt, Earl of Peterborough*.  
(Dantsey, Wilts.)

*Joseph Addison.* (Bodleian.)

*John Evelyn.* (Wootton, Surrey.)

In *Walpole*, Vol. III., page 232, is condensed correspondence between Pepys and Kneller concerning the Bodleian portrait of Dr. Wallis which apparently Kneller ranked high in his *œuvre*.

When the picture was completed, Sir Godfrey wrote to Mr. Pepys, "I can show I never did a better picture, nor so good a one in my life; which is the opinion of all that has seen it; and which I have done merely for the respect I have for your person, sense, and reputation; and for the love of so great a man as Dr. Wallis."

In 1716 Kneller was seventy years old. Yet we find him still producing crisp and vigorous work. As late as 1719 he painted a portrait called *Princess Sophia* (reproduced in *Lely and the Stuart Portrait Painters*, II., p. 92.) which in fluency of touch and freshness of character is an innovation. Leaving the stock Kneller behind, it strides a long way towards Hogarth. But, of course, the sand was slipping through, faster and

faster. Kneller was very old, his hand was losing grip. The *Lord Cowper* in the Portrait Gallery, painted in 1722, is an old man's work, blurred and soft. Though restoration has further mollified this picture, we can see, comparing it with the *Wren* of a decade earlier, how dimmed the painter's eye had grown, how slow and tentative his hand. Even then it is a creditable achievement which few painters of seventy-six could better.





## CHAPTER IV

### THE QUALITY OF THE ARTIST, AND HIS INFLUENCE

IN discussing Lely we considered the effect of the *perruque* upon his reputation. It hardly, then, seems necessary to repeat that argument, merely substituting Kneller's name for Lely's. We need say no more than that we have just as much reason on our side in contending that Sir Godfrey suffers from the same cause as Sir Peter. In his case, too, we can point to such a wigless portrait as the Charterhouse *Doctor Burnett* to support our claim. And, such is the insidious force of prejudice, if we did not know that this noble work was by Kneller, we should rank it even higher than we do at present. If certain others of his best portraits were unwigged—for example, the Petworth *Unknown Man* [No. 284 reproduced in

the *Petworth Catalogue*, 1919], the *Richard Boyle, Viscount Shannon*, at Bayfordbury, the *Duke of Portland* at Welbeck (reproduced in *Lely and the Stuart Portrait Painters*, II., p. 86), and the National Portrait Gallery *Henry Sidney, Earl of Romney*, and we were unaware of their authorship, we should recognise that at his top form Kneller is one of the best painters who have worked in England. As regards his position among his European contemporaries, our inveterate modesty about English produce, and the general conspiracy to believe that French painters are always better craftsmen, with better taste and a sounder tradition than British, blind us to the relative superiority of Kneller to Rigaud, Largillière and Nattier, so far as painter-like quality and true draughtsmanship are concerned. We can go further still with perfect safety and say that, judged on the same grounds, Perronneau is Kneller's inferior. No oil painting by that admirable and expensive artist is as well constructed or as well painted as the best works by Kneller, though they are wittier



Lord Leconfield

*Portrait of an Unknown Man*

Sir Godfrey Kneller



and incomparably more charming. But it would be dishonest to attempt to maintain that our higher appreciation of Nattier and Perronneau, and the consequent condition of their market, are inexplicable and unjustifiable.

What, then, is wrong with Kneller? In three words, insensitiveness to charm. Here at once the door is opened to endless argument. Subjectivity *versus* objectivity; association *versus* pure abstraction; sentimentality and sex against cold, precise statement of significant form. Fortunate we are in having no business, in this connection, with the profounder conditions of portraiture. For neither Nattier nor Rigaud, Kneller nor Perronneau is counted with the revealers of deep-seated emotion or subtle thought. The appeal that Nattier makes is, like Boucher's, quite subjective. I refuse to think how Freud and his tribe of psychoanalysts would diagnose the complexes of Nattier and Boucher. But if we could have had the benefit of Nattier's own explanation of his work, it might have been quite simply that he did his best to

make his sitters, of either sex, appear unto others as desirable as they would they could appear unto themselves. For his tolerable success in this ambition, Nattier is one of the masters for whom California and New York will pay the thousands which London and Paris no longer can afford. Kneller, on the other hand, whatever his adventures with the Quaker's wife, would, I suspect, have been less interesting to the psycho-analysts, and if we could have interviewed him for the gossip column in the *Sketchy Mirror*, our headline would probably have run: "Artist bored stiff; doesn't care how women look." For that *ennui* and that indifference Kneller is still paying.

If we ever outgrow our superstition that French painters are infallible craftsmen and super-humanly unsentimental, dipped at birth, heels and all, in prophylactic waters, we shall recognise that the average painter of the *dix-huitième* is akin, in spirit at least, to the ordinary academician, one of whose vices has justly been defined as the desire to be attractive at all costs. Now Kneller cannot be

charged with this. The worthier breed of artist tries to be true, though incidentally his work may be quite attractive. How far, if at all, may we include Kneller in the latter category? Without meaning more than we have justification for, we can fairly claim that the spirit of objective truth exhibited in a number of his portraits warrants such inclusion. Whether portraiture can really be "objective" is so debatable that perhaps we ought to define the issue less equivocally. Indeed, so far as one can tell, all that this talk of subjective and objective portraits practically means is that in one the painter's personal bias, or his itch to be attractive, demonstrably falsifies truth, and in the other he permits neither private prejudice nor the wish to please to contradict his instinctive impressions. If his intuition of a sitter be unflattering he will not deliberately palliate its interpretation ; if he sees his sitter as a "bounder," in the vulgar phrase, or as a ninny, he will not paint him as a Vere de Vere or as a film man of iron. He will not consciously "improve" on nature nor be

so emotionally undisciplined that his sentiment puts a false construction on life.

We barely know an instance of Van Dyck approaching a portrait in an attitude of aloof or disapproving criticism. He saw the world, apparently, through a perpetual glamour, so that the lowest depth to which his clients could fall was insipidity. Lely, as we have seen, went further occasionally, interpreting, in his rather sullen way, morose and harassed minds and gross appetites. In Kneller I think we can detect a more actively personal attitude, which allies him more closely to modern realism in portraiture. The classic example of mordant realism in modern painting is Goya, whose mind, in this respect, was as a rapier to Kneller's broad-sword. In the Spaniard we often can detect, if not malevolence, at least cynicism; his portraits are a bitter commentary on life.

A better parallel for Kneller, perhaps, and one immediately available for reference, is Augustus John. Not only in draughtsmanship and brushwork, but also in mood, Kneller's *Henry Sidney, Earl of*





*National Portrait Gallery*

*Henry Sidney, Earl of Romney*

Sir GODFREY KNELLER



*Romney*, in the Portrait Gallery, or his *Marquess of Tweeddale*, in the National Gallery, are of the same blood as the ordinary John portrait of Peace Conference Pillars, or Port Sunlight Proprietors. These portraits are well worth close study, for they are at once the justification and indictment of Sir Godfrey. They fully justify him on two grounds, technical and interpretative.

In the *Tweeddale* we have spontaneous painting which amounts, if I may be pardoned a somewhat involved idea, to a sort of thinking aloud in paint. The portrait is not a sketch, *au premier coup*, but a finished piece, achieved by complete mastery of method and by unerring execution. The method is not one of simple, single coat impasto, but one which gets its effect, apparently in one sitting, by the device of transparent over-painting. When this effect is attained by a process of leisured glazings and scumblings, it is respectable. But when it is attained so directly and swiftly, with each touch final, each stroke expressing form, and no touch or stroke impinging

on another's job, it is astonishing. This instantaneous but finally right technique is possible only to a master who knows exactly what pigment will do and who has in his finger-tips the knack of swift and vivid draughtsmanship. But for Kneller and Hogarth, whose *Shrimp Girl* is a masterpiece of direct and subtle painting, we do not find examples of this knowledge and ability in English painting before quite modern times. Not that Van Dyck and Lely, Reynolds and Gainsborough, were deficient either in craftsmanship or knowledge of form. But, somehow, they do not seem to have regarded this direct manner of painting as practical politics. Indeed, I doubt whether painters generally turned their attention to the possibilities of direct painting, as distinct from more or less elaborate process, before the nineteenth century. Up till then the final value of every brush stroke, the propriety of making each touch do its job, once for all, was not considered in the schools, and I believe this creed was not familiar in English art teaching before Legros incorporated it in Slade School principles.

Kneller may in this respect be regarded as a pioneer of modern technique.

We have noted that our painter was quite a swell in the fashionable set of his world. And we know that an absurd vanity supported him. I am not aware of the character of the Marquess of Tweeddale. But regarding Kneller's portrait, one has not much difficulty in supposing that he, too, was a mighty man of state, who did not suffer unduly from self-underestimation. Nor may it be far-fetched to read in this portrait that Kneller was not convinced it was his duty to play sycophant to the great man's arrogance. For here is no desire to be attractive; instead we find pitiless resolution to analyse unpleasant character. And it is a remarkable exposure. More than any portrait of its time in England or in France it makes history alive. If we wished for an embodiment of the swollen insolence and impervious scorn of the less captivating type of the Whig or Tory noble, we could hardly find a more adequate instance. Grossly materialistic and sceptical; cynically corrupt and

sensual; the natural product of social and political conditions since 1649, the great officials of that century's decay seem typified in Kneller's portrait. Nor is it merely a record of a particular era or caste, since it illuminates for us inveterate and universal character.

The *Earl of Romney*\* (1700) is a specimen of Kneller's more usual technique: less positive in brushwork, cooler in colour than the *Tweeddale*. But the same liquid fusion of the silvery under-painting with the ivory and carmine of the lights is noticeable. With extraordinary skill this under-painting graduates into the warmer upper coat, the colours merging, and the thin transparent paint imperceptibly becoming a fluent impasto. Last of all, where needed, a strong tone of burnt sienna is applied. In character interpretation it is more intimate than the *Tweeddale*. If Kneller was anti-pathetic to the insolent Scot and showed his resentment, he seems to have approached Henry Sidney, that greatly

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\* *Vide the Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 28, p. 87.

daring libertine who incurred James II's peculiar displeasure, with something like sympathy. He makes no effort to disguise the proud sardonic temper of the man ; he sees him clearly as a hard-bitten campaigner, wasted by deep and discreditable experience, as one whose easy principles and perfect selfishness would disqualify him for any position of trust. The restless hawk-like face, with hungry eyes and infirm lips, betrays a craving yet unslaked. It is not the face of the gross and sated sensualist,—for example, Lely's *Wycherley* in the Portrait Gallery. The feverish, unhappy eyes are those of the prematurely aging *roué*, still ridden by desire. And yet in the proud and thrusting carriage of the head, in the keen and beautiful lines, and the freedom from complacent scorn, we feel that Kneller discerned that somewhere in the man lay something rather splendid.

This portrait and the *Marquess of Tweeddale*, we have said, are at once a justification and indictment of their author. For we must wonder why works of this perfect technique and significant

character are the minor part of Kneller's output, and what is the explanation of the mass of slipshod and perfunctory stuff he turned out. We might put up a specious defence by contending that, if Kneller were judged by his best works only, which make a respectably long list, he would hold his own well as regards quality and number with any portrait painter of, as one may put it, his weight. His *Dr. Burnett* (1693), of the Charterhouse, his *Lady Mar* (1715), at Alloa Park, the *Duke of Portland* (1697) at Welbeck, the *Unknown Man* (c. 1690) at Petworth, the *Kitkat Lord Wharton* (1717), *Lord Burlington* (1717), *Lord Shannon*, *Sir Samuel Garth* and *Maynwaring*, the *Clumber Edward Fowler*, *Bishop of Gloucester* (1711), and the *National Portrait Gallery Wren* (1711), keen and sure in handling, humorous in feeling, all are masterly achievements. The *Burnett*, in beautiful use of paint and dignified conception, ranks with the best portraits painted in England. The *Lady Mar*, with a colour scheme of pale biscuit, Naples yellow, silver white and





National Gallery

*The Marquess of Tweeddale*

Sir Godfrey Kneller



black, is refined and winning—almost charming. Curiously enough her whim to be painted in a man's *perruque* adds to the attractiveness of the portrait. The Kitkat *Richard Boyle, Viscount Shannon*, of about 1717, has all the qualities of spontaneity and final rightness which we have discussed in relation to the *Marquess of Tweeddale* and *Earl of Romney*. The flesh grays are silvery, as in Gainsborough's most silvery portraits, the handling is as fluent as Gainsborough's, but with a richer impasto. Each stroke does its business, once for all: the result combines the elusive flow of a sketch with the solidity and research of a complete picture. Three other pictures must be mentioned here: the strangely emotional portrait of *Wycherley* at Knole, painted about 1705, which rather tantalisingly implies that somewhere in Kneller lay a germ of true imagination and insight; a charming child portrait of *Wriothesley Russell*, at Woburn, and an equally sympathetic and unaffected portrait of *The Ladies Churchill* at Althorp. These throw an unexpected light on him, since most

of his child portraits are tediously un-childlike.

This list could be lengthened, of course, by many other thoughtful portraits of impeccable technique, but a longer could be compiled from Kneller's indifferent and downright bad work. And if our proposition is that he did enough good work to be included with our best painters, we must also recognise that his inferior and quite worthless portraits proportionately far outnumber the inferior productions of those others. If some of his best pictures are as finely done as Van Dyck's, none of the latter's least worthy pieces approach the mechanical emptiness of Kneller's indifferent stratum, and certainly Lely's worst work was not so poor as Kneller's.

Let us resist the temptation to aggrandise Kneller, and honestly attempt to place him. We have indicated the quality of his best production, and everyone knows that of his worst. I will not say that specimens of his lowest level can be seen in the National Portrait Gallery. But for ready reference his *Lady Anne*

*Churchill* can be studied there as a typical example of his insufferable boredom and shirking. As we have already intimated, his mechanical aptitude for working whether he was bored or interested, and his plan of allowing deplorably bad work to leave his easel, when suffering from lack of interest, were his great vices. More than any other painter of his gifts he indulged them. But that is not all. He was naturally of slow sympathies : stodgy in perception. His most winning women portraits miss subtle charm and breeding. In a fatal way he reduced almost every one he painted to a family likeness to some phlegmatic Teutonic ideal. Therefore we may fairly say that, so far as Kneller helps us, we have really no idea of the English character of society from 1680-1723. His habit of generalisation and reduction to a foreign type effectually obstructs our view. In this, as we have already said, he resembles Lely.

Perhaps the chief indictment against Kneller is that of generalisation, the common fault of rapid workmanship and shallow feeling. The number of his

portraits which convince us of an individual, with special character and traits, solely his or her own, is very small. In fairness we must admit that the number of such portraits in Van Dyck's *œuvre* is not large, and of course it is less in Lely's. And when we turn on to the great English painters of the eighteenth century we are not satisfied that separate individuality of character is their *forte*. It is true that Reynold's range is about as wide as that of any painter of his class, but Gainsborough and Romney and Raeburn are more restricted. And though Lawrence's range is rather wider than Kneller's, Hoppner's, if there be anything to choose, is narrower. Had Lawrence and Hoppner worked on the material with which Kneller was confronted, we can assume that their achievement would be weaker and more monotonous than his; for, whereas Kneller can fall back on drawing and mastery of paint as some set-off against his lack of human interest, Lawrence and Hoppner would have little to commend them if severed from the suave

charm and sentiment of their time and types.

While Lely had the honour of synchronising with three of the greatest masters of portraiture, Kneller's lines were laid in a period of almost unmitigated mediocrity. Art was never at a lower ebb than from 1680-1710. The Italian Renaissance had long subsided to a dead level of insipid mannerism, barely relieved by the academic skill of a Piazzetta, a Menescardi, or a Zanchi. France had her Knellers in Largillière, the elder de Troy and Rigaud. Holland's glory was darkened when within a few years of each other, Vermeer and Jan Steen, De Hooch and Ruisdael, Hals and Rembrandt, died. The solitary light of Watteau was barely kindled ; the brilliant but facile invention of Tiepolo was yet unknown. The masters who flourished in that twilight were Benedetto Gennari, Carlo Maratti, Conca, Luca Giordano, van der Werff, the younger Mieris, and van der Meulen. It was a sodden and dispirited November. We have no difficulty in recognising that the artists who appear in the brown

landscape are insignificant compared with those who graced either the foregoing or succeeding summer. But, when we pit them one against the other, these fellow-bondsmen in a fallow time, our Godfrey Kneller comes well out of it.

And as we see him in the long perspective of the British school, what is his rank and what his special part in its development? If at his best he could use his tools as well as Van Dyck, he never showed the sense of breeding and spirit which are that master's greatest asset. Nor did he ever trouble to suggest that he could put forth any of Van Dyck's energy and invention as colourist and designer. Van Dyck, the Fleming, was an aristocrat in art; Lely, the Dutchman, was bourgeois and solid; Kneller, the German, was quite as plebeian as Lely, but less solid. In every way he seems a colder-blooded creature. Lely, as we have seen, could convincingly express in his rather heavy-handed way the sensual attractiveness of women. But Kneller showed no ability in this direction, partly because of his more phlegmatic temperament, and



partly, I think, because he was not interested enough. In technical qualities, again, he seems a colder fish, in that he does not reveal that appreciation of rich paint which is so remarkable in Lely. On the other hand his touch was lighter and his sense of quality more subtle.

Just as he cannot compare with Van Dyck in charm and breeding, so is he inferior in this respect to Reynolds, Gainsborough, Romney and Raeburn. They seldom experienced difficulty in painting ladies and gentlemen. But Kneller's best-born sitters seldom bear what we recognise as the authentic stamp. One complication, as already noted, is that Kneller's people are not really English in look, a fact which makes them appear remote from our conception of our aristocracy. Whether they more nearly resemble the German noblesse of Kneller's day, I have not ascertained. But in studying even Lawrence's portraits we recognise our fellow countrymen, who seem surprisingly like our contemporaries. Silly and insipid they may often seem, or weak and underbred ; but they are people

we know. Their very silliness and insipidity are modern ; we see all round us many chips of the same block. But Kneller's people are unlike anyone familiar to us ; they speak another language ; their type has vanished. And we are the more conscious of a sudden break because we regard Kneller as immediately precedent to Reynolds, whose people are so conspicuously modern that we readily respond to their moods. Of course, a closer study of English eighteenth-century portraiture shows us a transition period between Kneller and Reynolds, which eases the break. But if we go straight from the former to the latter we leap the wide gulf dividing seventeenth-century portraiture from late eighteenth : a feat which lands us in an entirely different country. What the social causes of this difference were we cannot discuss here. Why in so short a time we reach so different a conception must be explicable. Why almost suddenly it became the painter's concern to depict the intimate life of his sitters, the aspect they showed to their friends rather than the solemn

face they turned to the public: why, in short, playfulness and unguarded moods passed into the portrait painter's currency somewhere about 1750 must have a reason. But all we are here concerned with is that Kneller, separated only by some thirty years from this modernity, revealed none of these things.

To gauge his and Lely's positive part in the history of English painting we need simply consider what it would have done without them. There can be no doubt that without Lely to succeed Van Dyck, painting in England would have stagnated and decayed. It is futile to argue that but for Lely's predominance a truly native school would have developed and struck out independently. We must stick to facts. At Van Dyck's death and during the next forty years there was no painter in England, save Lely, strong enough to carry on the great tradition of craftsmanship without which no school can prosper. Certain painters, like Riley and Michael Wright, were more sensitive: but their gifts in that direction were counterbalanced by their limitations as

draughtsmen, colourists and designers. It is true that Lely's art was not the kind that founds a vital movement and promotes a great rebirth. Such things did not crop up towards the close of the seventeenth century, that unregenerate period of disillusioned apathy, fatigue and spiritual sloth. But Lely sustained the standard of craftsmanship and kept alive in England the great qualities which Van Dyck had assembled and bequeathed. Stern draughtsmanship, fine colour and a grave and noble use of paint formed Lely's bequest to Kneller.

He in turn, in his different method, kept the flag of craftsmanship flying and maintained the tradition of fine work. Without his standard and example, art in England, from 1680 to 1750, must have dropped to a level from which recovery would have been very difficult. But with Kneller there, setting the pace and, despite deplorable lapses, generally insisting on the probity of form and the true science of painting, his own disciples and foreigners like Dahl, one and all achieved some sort of science and soundness and

kept the flame alive. Thus Highmore and Hudson and Hogarth were keyed up and ushered in the new movement with something of Kneller's mastery. None will seriously pretend that, had Reynolds suddenly appeared in an environment in which craftsmanship had been long dead he would have so easily attained his position. The solid stock of craftsmanship on which from time to time Reynolds grafted fresh experiments in technique was Knellerian, though at no time was his science of draughtsmanship or paint as sound as Kneller's.

The ways of art seem unaccountable. We cannot clearly say what determines the manifestation of genius or of those clusters of outstanding talent which now and then amaze us. In our particular case, what controlled the difference in quality between Lely and Kneller on the one hand, and Reynolds and Gainsborough on the other? All that we can be sure of is that it was not accident, and that sound laws conditioned the quality of each. Attentive study of biology, psychology and environment might tell

us more. But in the meantime we may perhaps let it go at this : thanks to their position in the strata of history, Lely and Kneller were excluded from the company of the great artists ; wide sympathy, profound perception, discovery were denied them. But in a time of general laxity, corruption and rank growth they at least preserved the great tradition of stern draughtsmanship and beautiful quality in paint ; so that when a more fortunate and gifted era broke, its exponents, trained in that tradition, could straightway enter into their birth-right.

## APPENDIX I

### PORTRAITS BY KNELLER IN ENGLISH GALLERIES OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

#### NATIONAL GALLERY.

John, Marquess of Tweeddale (3272)

#### NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY.

Arnold Joost van Keppel, First Earl of  
Albemarle (1625)

William Russell, First Duke of Bedford (298)

William Congreve (67)

William, First Earl Cowper (*painted in* 1722)  
(1228)

John Gay (622)

Charles Montagu, Earl of Halifax (800)

John Howe (265)

James II. (*painted in* 1684-5) (666)

Sir Godfrey Kneller, Bart. (1365)

Anthony Leigh (1280)

Thomas Parker, First Earl of Macclesfield  
(*painted in* 1714) (799)

John Churchill, First Duke of Marlborough  
(*sketch*) (902)

James Scott, Duke of Monmouth and Buccleuch  
(1566)

John, Baron Somers (490)

John Smith, Engraver (273)

Anne Churchill, Countess of Sunderland (803)

Sir Christopher Wren (113)

Henry Sidney, E. of Romney (1722)

## HAMPTON COURT.

Lady Diana de Vere, Duchess of St. Albans  
 William III. landing at Margate, 1697  
 Lady Mary Bentinck, Countess of Essex  
 Carey Fraser, Countess of Peterborough  
 Lady Margaret Cecil, Countess of Ranelagh  
 Miss Pitt, afterwards Mrs. Scroop  
 Lady Isabella Bennet, Duchess of Grafton  
 Lady Mary Compton, Countess of Dorset  
 Lady Middleton  
 Marie Beatrix of Modena, Queen of James II

## GREENWICH HOSPITAL.

Admiral George Churchill (16)	} c. 1700 to 1705
Rear-Admiral Sir Thomas Dilkes (47)	
Admiral Sir George Byng (61)	
George Prince of Denmark (69)	
Vice-Admiral John Graydon (136)	
Vice-Admiral John Benbow (141)	
Vice-Admiral Sir Stafford Fairborne (143)	
Admiral Sir John Balchen (154)	

## VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM.

Portrait of the Artist

## LIVERPOOL (WALKER ART GALLERY).

Lady and Child

PORTRAITS PAINTED IN THE STUDIO OF SIR  
 GODFREY KNELLER, OR COPIES AFTER  
 KNELLER, IN THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT  
 GALLERY

Thomas Betterton (752)  
 John Sheffield, Duke of Buckingham and  
 Normandy (1779)  
 Barbara Villiers, Duchess of Cleveland (427)  
 James Craggs (the younger) (1134)



Charles Sackville, Sixth Earl of Dorset and  
Earl of Middlesex (250)

John Dryden (831)

George I (488)

George I (544)

Sidney, First Earl of Godolphin (1800)

John Locke (*by* J. Closterman, *after* Kneller)  
(114)

John Locke (550)

Heneage Finch, First Earl of Nottingham (1430)

Robert Hurley, Earl of Oxford and Mortimer  
(16)

Charles Talbot, Duke of Shrewsbury (1424)

Charles, Second Viscount Townshend (1755)

John Wallis, D.D. (578)

Isaac Watts, D.D. (264)

#### PORTRAITS ON LOAN TO OTHER DEPARTMENTS

Joseph Addison (283)

Charles, Second Viscount Townshend (1363)

## APPENDIX II

### LIST OF WORKS ON THE LIFE AND ART OF SIR GODFREY KNELLER

- Walpole's *Anecdotes*, 1828 Edn., iii, pp. 216-235.  
*D.N.B.*, xxxi, p. 240.  
Bryan's *Dict. Painters*, iii, p. 140.  
*Encyclop. Brit.*, Eleventh Edn., xv, p. 850.  
*Great Britain and Ireland*, by Sir W. Armstrong  
(*Ars Una Series*), p. 174.  
*Lely and the Stuart Portrait Painters*, vol. ii, by  
C. H. Collins Baker.  
Wurzbach. *Niederländisches Künstlerlexikon*,  
i, pp. 296, 298.











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